THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

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by

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To my dear wife
ANNE
in token of twenty-four years
of happiness

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I should like to express my gratitude to Terence Tiller, the poet and BBC Drama Producer, who first aroused my interest in Peacock, and whose polymathic mind has again and again guided me through the darker paths of research; and to Herbert Van Thal, who suggested that I should write this book. My especial thanks to Rosemary Heaward, who took over a substantial part of the typing at a complicated time, and who has also been most helpful with suggestions and criticism, and has supplied me with much valuable bibliographical information. I have also been enormously helped by the courtesy and efficiency of the staff of the Reading Room in the British Museum, and that of the BBC's Reference Library in London; and by Mr M. I. Moir, Assistant Keeper of Indian Records at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who, with his colleagues, has given me every assistance in matters concerning the East India Company. My thanks, too, to all those correspondents who have given me prompt answers to various queries, and who have wished the book well

Like King Melvas in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, I have of course gone marauding, my prey being all the previous writers on Peacock whom I could lay my hands on. I have done my utmost to be fair here, and to give open acknowledgement where it is due. If there are any omissions, they are inadvertent, and regretted.

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Introduction

When Thomas Love Peacock slipped quietly from the world, on 23 January 1866, at the age of eighty-one, there was notice of his death in *The Times*, an inadequate obituary in the *Athenaeum*, and little else. Except for *Gryll Grange*, which appeared in 1860, he had not written a novel for over thirty years. Much of his other work was forgotten, or unknown, and since his retirement from the East India Company in 1856 he had lived quietly at Lower Halliford on the Thames, seldom visiting London, and keeping touch with very few friends.

One of these friends was Sir Henry Cole, who edited a collected edition of his works, as then known, published in three volumes by Richard Bentley & Sons in 1874–5. This contained a Preface by Lord Houghton, and a Biographical Notice by his grand-daughter, Edith Nicolls.[1] Active behind the scenes was a Belfast solicitor, Thomas L'Estrange, who greatly admired Peacock, and who persistently urged Miss Nicolls to tell us more about her grandfather than her natural reticence allowed.[2] In 1891 came the ten-volume edition published by J. M. Dent and edited by Richard Garnett, of which the volume called *Calidore and Miscellanea* contained the *Recollections of Thomas Love Peacock* by Sir Edward Strachey, whose father had been a colleague and friend of Peacock's in his early days at East India House. George Saintsbury's edition of the novels, published by Macmillan, followed in 1895–7.

In 1904 the first biography appeared, in the form of a thesis for a university doctorate by Arthur Button Young, and in 1910 this same champion of Peacock edited his three plays, which were among the manuscripts sold by Edith Nicolls, then Mrs Clarke, to the Trustees of the British Museum in 1903. Reviewing the plays in the *Athenaeum* of February 1911, Clive Bell could refer to Peacock as virtually a forgotten man; but later that year came the biography by

the American Carl Van Doren, and the shorter, penetrating critical study by A. Martin Freeman. In 1924 the definitive Halliford edition started appearing, edited by H. L. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones.[3] This is in an expensive limited edition, and for private reading one needs the *Collected Novels*, edited by David Garnett, Richard Garnett's grandson. His notes are a valuable complement to those of the Halliford edition, which are mostly textual and bibliographical. There have recently appeared admirable paper-back editions of *Nightmare Abbey* and *Crochet Castle*, edited by Raymond Wright, Senior Lecturer in Literature at the University of Liverpool.

J. B. Priestley's *Life*, first published in 1927, is probably still the best short introduction, though even the reprint of 1963 does not take account of some of the subsequently available material. Another excellent short study is that by Olwen W. Campbell, particularly good on Peacock's friendship with Shelley. There are also interesting recent books by Lionel Madden and Howard Mills. In France, in 1933, there appeared the stimulating if formidable *Un Epicurien Anglais, Thomas Love Peacock* by Jean-Jacques Mayoux, which, as far as I know, still offers the challenge of translation.[4] A recent work of the first importance from America is Carl Dawson's study, *His Fine Wit*, which appeared in 1969.

These are only a few of the books which show the rising curve of interest in Peacock after the neglect which he suffered earlier. An interesting sign, and, I believe, a contributory cause of it has been his career, if I may so put it, with the British Broadcasting Corporation. In the 1950s the new Third Programme found space for a number of the novels, which Douglas Cleverdon adapted and produced as plays for radio. This proved to be a very happy medium for Peacock, because it is as free as the novel itself from the practical limitations of the theatre, and also because of Peacock's acutely sensitive ear.[5]

In *His Fine Wit*, Carl Dawson remarked that there had been no full biography, apart from Mayoux's, since those of Van Doren and Freeman in 1911, and that, with all the new material available, there was room for another study of Peacock's personality. Accordingly, I have ventured, and the quest has been a fascinating one.

I hope that my efforts may play a small part in ending impetus to the tide of interest in Thomas Love Peacock to which his friend Shelley looked forward long ago:[6]

> . . . his fine wit
> Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it.
> A strain too learned for a shallow age,
> Too wise for selfish bigots, let his page,
> Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
> Fold itself up for the serener clime
> Of years to come, and find its recompense
> In that just expectation.

London, May 1971

Chapter One

AGE AND INNOCENCE

In the early eighteen-sixties, the Scottish poet, Robert Buchanan, tired, as he put it, of 'climbing up the breaking wave of London', set out for Lower Halliford in Surrey. As a student in Scotland, he had met Thomas Love Peacock in the company of Shelley. Later, he had written to him, quite ready for a cold response, and had been 'agreeably disappointed': the answer had come, 'not savage, like a rap on the knuckles, but cordial as a handshake'.[1] So now, one summer's day, he decided to seek him out, in his retirement on the banks of the River Thames. Passing over Chertsey Bridge, he walked through miles of green fields and delightful lanes, till he came to a garden lawn by the river. There he found Peacock, a smiling old man of over seventy, with a fine shock of silver-white hair, seated on a chair. Behind him, the open door of his library showed a vista of cool shelves. At the bottom of the garden steps, a rowing-boat was gently swinging. And

> '... a little maiden of sixteen rested on his knees the great quarto *Orlando Innamorato* of Bojardo, and, following with her fingers the sunlit lines, read soft and low, corrected ever and anon by his kind voice, the delicate Italian he loved so well.'

The girl, Clari, was herself a link with the past. On her father's side, she was the grand-daughter of Leigh Hunt, and on her mother's of the Williams who was drowned with Shelley in 1822. And, as for Peacock, Buchanan reflected that this old man had, in Browning's phrase, 'seen Shelley plain'

> '... not once, but a thousand times ... and had known well both Harriet Westbrook and Mary Godwin ... and had dined with Jeremy Bentham ... and was, in short, such a living chronicle of

things past and men dead as filled one's soul with delight and ever-varying wonder.'

Buchanan could have added that he had lived through the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the Regency, the disappearance of the stage-coach, the coming of the railways, the Reform Bill, the accession of Queen Victoria, and the Indian Mutiny; and, during that long life, he had enriched the world with works unique in English literature. As George Saintsbury has said of him:

'The English Muse seems to have set, at the joining of the old and new ages, this one person with the learning and taste of his ancestors, with the irreverent taste of the moderns, to comment on the transition; and, having fashioned him, to have broken the mould.'[2]

A good likeness of Peacock, as he saw him on that summer's day, is, Buchanan tells us, shown in the photograph taken at about that time, which appeared in Cole's edition of 1875, and is reprinted in the present book. 'Who that looked at him then', he wrote, 'could fail to perceive, to quote Lord Houghton's words, "that he had gone through the world with happiness and honour"?' He possessed, according to Buchanan, a 'beautiful benignity', the secret of which lay in a phrase from one of his favourite authors, Fontenelle: '*L'amour a passé par-là*!'[3]

Looking at that same photograph, J. J. Mayoux, Peacock's French biographer, comes to a rather different conclusion. He sees: '. . . *un regard de visuel, et non de visionnaire, et qui n'accomodera jamais à l'infini. Ce n'est pas l'antichambre de l'âme, mais l'instrument de l'esprit d'analyser, le serviteur d'une prodigieuse mémoire* . . .'.

But those same shrewd eyes would not have been surprised to see a Hamadryad darting through the trees. Peacock was a man of contradictions: a man who tested ideas by ridicule, but, at the same time, looked for truth in them; an agnostic, who, late in life, filled his study with pictures of St Catherine.[4] I showed this same photograph once to the son of a German painter, who knew nothing about Peacock. 'There', he said, 'is a kindly misanthropist.'

A picture in the National Portrait Gallery gives a different impression again. This is the portrait painted in 1858 by Henry Wallis, who in the same year ran off with Peacock's favourite daughter, Mary Ellen, when her marriage to George Meredith was on the point of collapse. This portrait was never liked by the family, and, when the big Halliford edition was being prepared, his granddaughter asked the editors not to include it. It shows a flushed, choleric man, and probably reflects the uneasiness of the painter as much as of the sitter. But in his edition for the Boston Bibliophile Society, Richard Garnett produced a black-and-white version of it, which, free from the disturbing colour, is of extraordinary interest. It suggests the man who could write *Sir Proteus*, or Mr Cranium's lecture in *Headlong Hall*, or the astonishing outburst against Burke and Southey which occurs in a footnote to *Nightmare Abbey*. The choleric side of Peacock's nature was an essential part of him, and cannot be brushed aside in any study of his complex personality.

Peacock's contradictions have sometimes been a source of exasperation to those who have written about him. But a man does not live his life for the convenience of his biographers. In this book I hope to show that there is a pattern running through his apparent inconsistencies. Basically, it is a question of balance. In the novels, he is always balancing one point of view against another. 'The play of opinion', as he called it, is as essential to his construction as is counterpoint to a writer of fugues. Peacock's astrological friend, Mr J. F. Newton, would have found it highly significant, if he noticed the fact that Peacock was born under the Sign of Libra, the Scales.

This sense of balance goes deeper than the level of ideas. Peacock was no cold fish. He was highly emotional; but he took care to govern his emotions, not by suppressing them, but, again, by balancing them against each other. This is why the same man could write, in *The Philosophy of Melancholy*:

> Can the fond hours, in morning revels passed,
> Teach the light heart to meet the evening blast?

and, in *Maid Marian*, could give Friar Tuck the famous line:

'The world is a stage, and life is a farce, and he that laughs most has most profited of the performance.' In excess, melancholy can paralyse, and mirth can make a man vulnerable. Each is therefore necessary to the other, and to Peacock, the art of living is to navigate between them. This is, of course, a counsel of perfection, and it is endearing and human in Peacock that on occasion his emotions do carry him away. Because he was emotional and sensitive, Peacock developed a protective covering of shyness and reserve. Sir Maurice Bowra is reported to have said recently: 'I developed a mocking, cynical way of treating events because it prevented them from becoming too painful';[5] Peacock might well have said the same. Another remark that makes one think of Peacock is when someone asked Ogden Nash, on his last visit to London before his death, why he wrote so little prose. He is said to have answered: 'I feel very naked when I do . . . like an oyster without a shell.'[6] Peacock had his shell. It took the form of an array of eccentric characters, among whom he distributed his ideas so that one has perpetually to ask where he is laughing and where being serious. As Olwen W. Campbell says in her excellent short biography, this perpetual problem makes reading and re-reading Peacock an unfailing delight.

Peacock's first novel, *Headlong Hall*, did not appear until he was thirty. In his early years, he was more concerned with trying to become a serious poet. But side by side with the serious young man who wrote *Palmyra* and *The Genius of the Thames* walked the satirist of *The Monks of St Mark* and *The Alarmists*. In the first six chapters of this book, we watch him approaching his true goal, in the manner of Voltaire's hero, 'by paths unknown, even to himself'.[7] A newcomer to Peacock might do worse than turn ahead and read a few passages from the novels—Chapter Six, perhaps, of *Nightmare Abbey*, or the 'Nude Venus' scene from *Crochet Castle*, before accompanying him on the journey.

Thomas Love Peacock was born in 1785, a year after the death of Dr Johnson. The War of American Independence was just over, the French Revolution had not yet begun. At home the Industrial Revolution was on its way. There were murmurs of popular discontent, but there was also a comfortable feeling that Pitt's young

government, swept to power in the previous year, would know how to deal with any trouble of that kind.

Peacock's father, Samuel, was a London glass merchant, of 46 Holborn Bridge. His mother, born Sarah Love, was the daughter of a vigorous old sea-captain, and of Sarah Pennell, the aunt of Mrs John Wilson Croker. There is a formal attestation of Peacock's birth, made, for sone unknown reason, by his mother some forty years later, in 1824: 'I hereby certify that my son Thomas Love Peacock was born on the eighteenth day of October in the year of Our Lord Seventeen Hundred and Eighty Five at a quarter past two in the morning at Weymouth in Dorsetshire'.

Why was she in Weymouth? Peacock's earlier biographers vaguely suggested reasons of ill health; but in October 1931 a Dr Wyatt Wingrave wrote to *Notes and Queries*, drawing attention to two entries in the Minutes of the Weymouth Borough Courts. The first, dated 21 September 1637, records that 'Nathaniel Peacock was presented, because he allows games of cards to be used in his house'. The second shows 'a bookseller by the name of Love' as appearing on 4 October 1790 to answer an indictment for assault on one Richard Whicker.[8] So there were both Peacocks and Loves in this part of the country, and Dr Wingrave makes the point that 'in Dorset it is customary for young women to go home for their first confinement under their mother's care'.

Another note, undated but in the mother's hand, states that her son was born on 18 October 1785, at Melcombe Regis—a fashionable neighbourhood near Weymouth—and that the child was 'baptized by Dr Hunter of the Scots Kirk, London Wall'. This is the only evidence we have of the baptism. Carl Van Doren, writing sixty years ago, found that the kirk and its registers had already disappeared. It would be interesting to know why a Scots kirk was chosen. J. B. Priestley notes that the name Peacock is known in Scotland, and contents himself with saying that 'if there was any Scots blood in the novelist, he certainly contrived to subdue it'. The Scots come under frequent bombardment in Peacock's writings; on the other hand, he makes frequent reference to William Drummond and Lord Monboddo, both Scottish writers, and Robert Burns was one of his favourite poets. Robert Buchanan assures us

that his attitude to the Scots was really one of Aristophanic mock-animosity—that 'he was very fond of Scotchmen . . . but he could not spare them for all that, any more than Thackeray could spare the Irish, whom he loved with all his heart'. Was there, one wonders, any Scots blood on his father's side?

The earlier biographers accept that the father died in 1788, when Peacock was three, and when his mother took him to live with her parents in Chertsey. Kelley's Directory shows that in that year the firm of Samuel and Thomas Peacock, glass-merchants, became George and Thomas Peacock, and subsequently Peacock and Roper, and Peacock and Davidson.[9] But it remains a puzzle that there is no certificate of his death, not any record of any will or settlement—which has left Peacock's biographers in the dark about the Peacock family's finances. And then, among the papers sold by Mrs Clarke to the Trustees of the British Museum, a letter came to light, written from his school at Englefield Green on 14 August 1792, when he was just under seven. It was addressed to his mother, care of a Captain Love at Chatham Dockyard, and it runs:

Honoured Mother,

I wish you would write to Caperney Gray to send me my poney [*sic*] and my books: and I wish that you would come and see me as soon as possible, and bring me some candied lemon, and figs and cakes, and write to my Father to tell him to send home some Sweet meats, for your dutiful son,

Thomas Love Peacock

There is no doubt about the authenticity of the letter. It was accompanied by a covering letter from the headmaster, John Harris Wicks, saying: '. . . her son, having composed and written the above without orders, he could not in justice to him refrain from sending it with all its faults . . . . Being entirely unassisted, Mr Wicks thinks much praise is due to him for this maiden production'.[10]

What is the explanation? Had he been taught to call his grandfather 'father', or was some elaborate deception being practised?

No answer along these lines seems at all convincing. Eleanor Nicholes, in her chapter in K. N. Cameron's *Shelley and his Circle*, concludes that when Peacock was seven his father was alive, and that Peacock knew it.[11] It is difficult to disagree with her: Peacock always showed the greatest aversion to the matter being discussed, and, whatever the answer is, it may well account for Peacock's lifelong dislike of the Mr Eavesdrops of this world who betray private confidences.

All we know is that in 1788 Sarah Peacock took her small son to her parents' house in Surrey. This move to the countryside brought great happiness to Peacock's childhood. Chertsey lies on the banks of the Thames, and on the edge of Windsor Park and Windsor Forest. In those days it was still a village, with its market-day and its fair, and until the end of the century, less than three thousand inhabitants.[12] The Loves' house had the splendid name of Gogmore Hall, which seems to have found echoes in some of the titles of the novels. It no longer exists, though there is a Gogmore Lane in Chertsey to this day. Peacock's grandfather, Captain Love, was a retired senior master of the Royal Navy, who had lost his leg aboard H.M.S. *Prothée* under Lord Rodney in action against the French on 12 April 1782, in the West Indies. When he died in 1805 at the age of eighty, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, under the heading 'Obituary, with Anecdotes, of Remarkable Persons', recorded his gallantry in action, and added:

> 'He was the last of those officers who received pensions for their services on that memorable day. He leaves two sons in the Navy, Thomas Love, Master, who was lately employed as agent to the commissioners of the Spanish detained ships in the Mediterranean, and Lieutenant Love, secretary to the Honourable Admirable Berkeley, who was standing by the side of his father when he lost his leg.'

Captain Love's widow survived him by eight years, dying at the age of eighty-three. A cousin, Sir Henry Ommanay Love, rose to the rank of admiral. Larger than life, the captain was made by Peacock larger still, and appears in his second novel, *Melincourt*,

as Captain Hawltaught of the frigate *Tornado*, who acquired in his travels a highly intelligent Orang Outang:

> 'Three years they cruised together in the Tornado, when a dangerous wound compelled the old Captain to renounce his darling element, and lay himself up in ordinary for the rest of his days. He retired on his half-pay and the produce of his prize-money, to a little village in the west of England, where he employed himself very assiduously in planting cabbages and watching the changes of the wind . . . . He was sure that every enemy to wine and grog must have clamped down the hatches on some secret villainy which he feared good liquor would pipe ahoy, and he usually concluded by striking up *Nothing like Grog*, *Saturday Night*, or *Swing the flowing Bowl*, his friend Oran's horn ringing in sympathetic symphony.'

Captain Love had a great influence on the young Peacock. Edith Nicolls describes how, as a small boy, he 'would listen for hours to his old sailor grandfather's descriptions of the great naval battles he had fought, and the meeting of the ships at the Mutiny of the Nore' (which attributes a certain prescience to the captain, since the Mutiny did not take place till 1799). Peacock did not follow directly in the family's naval tradition. In his early twenties, he spent a year aboard H.M.S. *Venerable*, and, according to his letters written from there, he was glad to leave it. But the ebullient captain must have stimulated the boy's imagination, as well as sharpening his sense of the absurd. And it is more than likely that the captain's sea-shanties attuned Peacock's sensitive ear so that he wrote those splendid songs and glees which, as George Saintsbury says, 'seem to have come into being of their own accord'.

The mother's influence was also a powerful and a lasting one, until she died at the age of eighty in 1833. Not for Peacock the boyhood troubles of Lord Byron, who christened his mother 'Allecto', after the most awful of the Furies. Sarah was a charming and highly intelligent woman, who could turn a poem on occasion, but was also very competent in practical domestic matters. The picture we have of her shows a strong, open face, like that of Peacock himself as a young man, and of his daughter, Mary Ellen,

whose daughter, Edith Nicolls, tells us that 'there existed between Mrs Peacock and her son, Thomas, the deepest love and sympathy: she was a woman of no common order of mind; he read all his writings to her, consulting her judgment and seeking her criticism'. In a letter to his correspondent, Thomas L'Estrange, Peacock once wrote: 'I passed many of my best years with my mother, taking more pleasure in reading than in society'. And when she died, he told a friend that he had 'never written with any zeal since'[13]—a remark echoed by Edith Nicholls, who says that 'he wrote with no interest, as his heart was not in his work'. According to family tradition, she was a great reader of Gibbon, and a copy of Gibbon was often open beside her. J. B. Priestley remarks that 'it is not give to every child to learn irony and epicureanism at his mother's knee'. But, as Mayoux points out, we need not assume that this *mère Gibbonienne* influenced her son against orthodox Christian belief. His early poems include a versification of the Lord's Prayer, and of passages from Isaiah and Revelations. The final stanzas of the first version of *Palmyra*, published in 1806, are strongly deistic. It was only later, when he had had time to think things out his own that he completely rewrote these final stanzas, substituting for the word 'God' the word 'necessity'.

Another source of happiness in his childhood was the Surrey countryside. His favourite places were Virginia Water and the Dell or, as he liked to call it, the Dingle. Even his school at Englefield Green was on the edge of the forest, and he retained from his childhood the belief that to be really effective a child's education must take place in beautiful surroundings. We must forget now the picture of him as a grand old man in his seventies, and imagine instead, in Edith Nicoll's phrase, 'a handsome boy, with dark eyes, a fine head, and splendid flaxen hair'—so handsome that once, it is said, Queen Charlotte, driving through Windsor Park, stopped her carriage to step down and kiss him. He was also a precocious child. He went to school at Englefied Green when he was eight and stayed there for six and a half years. We have already seen the letter about his father which earned his headmaster's approval. The next we have is a type of request normal enough among schoolboys, but Peacock chose to make it in Latin: '*Pecunia mihi semper opus est,*

sed nullo tempore magis quam presenti'. (Money is always a problem to me, but at no time more so than the present.) Another letter, also concerned with money, is dated February 1895, when he was nine:

> Dear Mother, I attempt to write you a letter
> In verse, though in prose I could do in much better.

Carl Dawson nicely observes in *His Fine Wit* that this opening statement 'has a touch of prophecy about it'. After some school gossip, the letter comes to the point:

> Poor Wade, my schoolfellow, lies low in the gravel;
> One month, ere fifteen, put an end to his travel;
> Harmless and mild, and remark'd for good nature:
> The cause of his death was his overgrown stature.
> His epitaph I wrote, as inserted below;
> What tribute more friendly could I on him bestow?
> The bard craves one shilling, of his own dear Mother,
> And if you think proper, add to it another.

And here is the epitaph:

> Here lies interr'd, in silent shade,
> The frail remains of Hamlet Wade;
> A youth more prom'sing, ne'er took breath;
> But, ere fifteen, laid cold in death.
> Ye young! ye old! and ye of middle age,
> Act well your part, for quit the stage
> Of mortal life some day you must;
> And like him, moulder into dust.

Mr Wicks was proud of his pupil, and foretold that he would prove one of the most remarkable men of his day. Peacock returned the compliment later in life, when he wrote that, even if Mr Wicks was not much of a scholar, he 'had the art of inspiring his pupils with a love of learning'. If there was one thing wrong with this happy childhood it was what Mayoux calls its 'rarified atmosphere'. An only child does not make friends easily. But Peacock did make one friend at school and visited his family's house in the holidays.

The boy's name was Charles Barwell, and his family lived at the nearby Abbey House, on the site of an old Priory.[14] Peacock wrote about it in 'Some Recollections of Childhood', which he contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837:[15]

'The Abbey House derived its name from one of those rich old abbeys whose demesnes the pure devotion of Henry the Eighth transferred from their former occupants (who probably imagined they had a right to them, though they lacked the might which is its essence) to the members of the convenient Parliamentary chorus, who helped him to run down his Scotch octave of wives.'

There we have a typical passage of Peacock, both in its ironic reference to the doctrine that 'might is right', and in its totally irrelevant side-swipe at the Scots. Such a chance is never missed.

But these recollections show us another side of Peacock: his regret for the old ways of life, which he saw vanishing all round him. Charles's family, he wrote: '. . . had the faculty of staying at home; and this was a principle among the antique faculties that upheld the rural mansions of the middling gentry. Ask Brighton, Cheltenham and *id genus omne* what has become of that faculty. Ask the ploughshare what has become of the rural mansions.'

And the mention of Charles's elder sister playing the harpsichord provokes the cry: 'The harpsichord! Over what a gulf of time this name looks back! What a stride from the harspichord to one of Broadwood's last grand pianos!'

The sister who played the harpsichord was also an adept at bottling and preserving. She had a little room between the front hall and the great staircase, stowed with sweetmeats, jellies, and preserved fruits, 'the work of her own sweet hands':

'These were distinguished ornaments of the supper-table; for the family dined early, and maintained the old fashion of supper. A child would not easily forget the bountiful and beautiful array of fruits, natural and preserved, and the ample variety of preparations of milk, cream, and custard, by which they were accompanied. The supper-table had matter for all tastes. I remember what was most to mine.'

To an only child, this family supper-table must have been magical. Perhaps it is from his visits to the Abbey House that we can trace Peacock's love of placing his characters together at a convivial meal. Perhaps, too, the elder sister was the origin of some of the charming ladies we shall meet in the novels, such as Caprioletta in *Headlong Hall*. Another influence on his future was the Barwell's connection with East India House, where Peacock was to spend so many years of his life. It is from the Abbey House, too, that comes Peacock's first ghost-story. His young friend Charles was a romantic. He read Gothic tales like Mrs Radcliffe's recently published *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and he felt that a place such as the Abbey House must surely contain a ghost. Peacock did his best to oblige him.[16] In the grounds there were two groves, one of them a forbidding place known as the dark grove. One night, looking towards it from the window, Peacock saw what seemed to be the white head-dress of a tall figure, advancing and then receding. A search party went out with torches and, disappointingly, the ghost turned out to be 'a large bunch of flowers on the top of a small lily, waving in the wind at the end of the grove, and disappearing at intervals behind the stem of a tree'. Peacock may have had this incident in his mind in *Nightmare Abbey*, when Mr Asterias looks out of the window, and sees a white figure on the seashore.

Later, Peacock drafted a fragment called *A Story beginning in Chertsey*. In this, three young friends have been out for a walk, and are returning for supper to the Swan Inn. One of the three has brought them back through a field of cowslips where he had played as a child, and has so timed their return that, as they reach the Abbey Bridge, the bells of Chertsey Church begin to strike eight o'clock:

> 'The three friends leaned over the bridge, listening to the bell in silence, till, having given the due numbers of the curfew, followed by those of the day of the months, and of the year of the Sovereign's reign, the bell was no longer heard. Then they resumed their walk, and passed on to the inn where they proposed to sup and pass the night.'

Notice the importance of sound in that nostalgic moment.

Peacock was acutely sensitive to sound, as we shall find again and again. One other memory of that happy childhood comes in the last novel, *Gryll Grange*. It is the first verse of a beautiful poem called 'Love and Age':[17]

> I played with you 'mid cowslips blowing,
> When I was six and you were four;
> When garlands weaving, flower-balls throwing,
> Were pleasures soon to please no more.
> Through groves and meads, o'er grass and heather,
> With little playmates to and fro,
> We wandered hand in hand together;
> But that was sixty years ago.

The happiness of that early childhood could not last. The day came when he had to change the Surrey countryside for London, where he worked as a clerk in the City. But whenever he could he came back to it, and he made it his home for the rest of his life.

Chapter Two

MONKS AND MORTALITY

We have one more letter written by Peacock while he was at school at Englefield Green. It is very different from the previous ones. It was written in 1796, when he was eleven, and seems to have been a school exercise, in the form of a letter of the editor of a newspaper. It begins:

'Dear Sir,
. . . Though I do not wish Mr Pitt's removal from his exalted station, yet I think he would have acted more in conformity with wishes of the People had he taxed everyone according to their income. I think, too, he was wrong to begin the War, but much more so, to refuse peace when the French demanded it; since which time we have suffered so many losses, and now vainly endeavour to extricate ourselves from a War in which his imprudence has involved us.

If that were all there was to the letter, it would be remarkable enough, but now he changes key and becomes, not the letter-writer, but the orator:

'In speaking to you, Sir, I would be considered as speaking for the people of England. Shall we, who for ages have kept the world in awe, yield to a cowardly, vainglorious, pusillanimous nation? Shall Britain, once

The terror and delight
Of distant nations . . . .[1]

yield to those hateful intruders, and thereby lose those laurels which our ancestors gained with so much danger and pains?





2 Miniatures of Peacock aged eighteen and Sarah Love Peacock by R Jean

No, my countrymen, arm, bravely arm, in defence of your country, nor own yourselves what posterity will shudder to think you, *Unworthy of English Blood*!'

The letter is not in Peacock's own hand, nor his mother's, but somebody clearly thought it worth transcribing. Perhaps it was shown round as an example of the boy's talent. Perhaps Mr Wicks thought it was time the boy moved on. At any rate, we hear next of Peacock as a clerk employed by a firm called Ludlow, Fraser & Co. in the City.[2] His employment is attested by the fact that in February 1800 he won a prize in a competition set by a magazine called the *Monthly Preceptor*. This was a new venture, whose numbers, when bound, were to be known as the Juvenile Library. It planned to include:

'. . . a Complete Course of Instruction on every useful Subject: particularly Natural and Experimental Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Natural History, Biography, Geography, and the Manners and Customs of Nations, Ancient and Modern Languages, English Law, Penmanship, Mathematics, and the Belles Lettres.'

Van Doren observes that 'it was hoped to carry out this Gargantuan scheme in four or five volumes', but that 'five or six seem to have been required'. In addition to this spate of information, the magazine was to print Prize Productions of Young Students, with 'a Monthly Distribution of Prizes, value Fifteen Guineas and upwards'. The subject set for the first competition was: 'Is History or Biography the more improving Study?' At this time, when Napoleon was striding all over Europe, and had many open and secret English admirers, a boy in his teens might well have been expected to indulge in a little hero worship. Not a bit of it! Peacock's entry ended:

Like as the morning star, with humble ray,
Throws a faint glimmer at the dawn of day,
Soon as the sun begins his beam to shed,
He shrinks away to nought, and hides his head:
'Tis thus Biography, whose humble pace
Pursues *one* only through life's eager race:

Before bright Hist'ry's open, daring ray,
She dwindles into nought, and shrinks away.
Hail then to thee, fair Hist'ry! 'tis for thee
To wear the golden crown of Victory!

An accompanying note stated:

'The writer of the foregoing was fourteen years old on the eighteenth of last October. He was six years at Mr Wicks' Academy, Englefield Green, and is now a clerk with us. He has not received the least assistance.
Ludlow, Fraser and Co., Angel Court, Throgmorton Street, February 11th, 1800.'

Peacock was not among the main prizewinners, one of whom was Leigh Hunt; but he was awarded a special prize for his poem which, though a contribution in verse had not been specified, was printed 'not as a specimen of poetry particularly excellent, but as an extraordinary effort of genius in a boy of his age'. The extra prize was a book, *Elegant Poetical Extracts Epitomized*, value five shillings.

There was also, in the first number of this magazine, a coloured plate of an orang-outang, 'attired', as Richard Garnett puts it, 'in defiance of reason, in an apron,' An accompanying article argued strongly that the apes must not be regarded as members of the human race They may have tongues and vocal organs, and perfect outlines on the palms of their hands and the tips of their fingers; but they possess an extra rib to the twelve of man, and—the clincher—they are dumb. When he came to write *Melincourt* and created Sir Oran Haut-ton, MP, Peacock took the other view and supported it with elaborate footnotes from Lord Monboddo, to the effect that the ape is naturally imitative and that it is only the complexities of the larynx which are causing him to take his time. Peacock would have been glad to know that a recent book assures us that the ape will be able to speak by the year 1988. One wonders what he will say.[3]

Edith Nicolls says that when he was sixteen Peacock began to study at the British Museum. He could have scarcely done so and worked at the same time as a clerk in the City, and the point has

been made that there is no record of his admission to the Reading Room before a reader's ticket dated 14 April 1823. However, Van Doren looked into this and reported that the superintendent was of the opinion that 'this may well have been a re-admission to fulfill the requirements of the new regulations adopted in 1822'. It has been suggested that he may have used the 'Oriental Reposittory' at East India House. He had connections there, through the Barwells of Abbey House, and a friend, Peter Auber, to whom they may have introduced him.[4] But Edith Nicolls stresses Peacock made his classical reading come alive by combining it with a study of the art of the period—the statues, the coins, and the bas-reliefs. For that, the British Museum was the obvious, if not the only place. Probably he was able to give up his work as a clerk. His success in the magazine competition was hardly enough for him to embark on a literary career, but the relaxation of tension in the short peace of 1802 may have had something to do with it, and—who knows?—a little money may have become available from one side or other of his family. Certainly he found the time to begin building up the store of classical knowledge which, in those days, was regarded as an essential part of a serious poet's equipment Apart from its professional usefulness, such study was to Peacock a delight. We know that his old schoolmaster, John Harris Wicks, had fired him with enthusiasm. Another Harris, the author of *Hermes*, had done the same. As he said in a letter to L'Estrange at the end of his life:

> 'I was early impressed with the words of Harris: "To be competently skilled in ancient learning is by no means a work of insuperable pains. The very progress itself is attended with delight, and resembles a journey through some pleasant country, where, every mile we advance, new charms arise. It is certainly as easy to be a scholar as a gamester, or many other characters equally illiberal and low. The same application, the same quantity of habit, will fit us for one as completely as the other".'

A great deal has been written about Peacock's lack of opportunity, or unwillingness, to sit for a university scholarship, and his consequent hostility to academic institutions. Oxford, in particular,

is a regular target in his novels. As usual, our lack of knowledge of the family's finances leaves us guessing, but had a scholarship fallen into his lap it is surely doubtful whether he would have taken it or gone through with it. Only sons who lose their father at an early age tend to have an ambivalent attitude towards authority. In one mood they can welcome it, because it promises to fill a need; but in another they turn against it, because the person exercising it is not the person he should be, i.e. the dead father. He is therefore a pretender, an impostor, to be toppled from his throne. Peacock was the sort of man who preferred to map out his own course of study: not for him the universities' 'deep-laid conspiracy against the human understanding'.[5] By self-education he lost something that would have been of value to him: the communication of ideas, in lectures, in tutorials, in debates and discussions. On the other hand, he retained his enjoyment of learning to the end of his life. In his eighties he was studying Spanish in order to read Calderon. He never went through the nervous strain of impending examinations, or the forcing which has so often had such disastrous results on sensitive and highly-strung temperaments. Mayoux, in one of his nice distinctions, reflects that Peacock, at a university, would have lost in '*humanisme*' but gained in '*humanité*'. But then, with a truly Gallic shrug of the shoulders, he asks: '*Somme tout, n'est-ce pas le mieux? Qu'eussions-nous fait d'un Peacock ramené à la moyenne?*'

If there is one effect of his lone approach to learning it is his endearing habit of tending to parade it. His assertion, for instance, that the *Dionysaca* of Nonnus was the best poem in the world after the *Iliad* provoked Edward Strachey to remark: 'It was pardonable if there was a little mixture of vanity in this, since very few but himself had the knowledge of the former which would qualify them for deciding or discussing the question on its merits'.

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, familiarity with the classics was, of course, the accepted and expected thing. Buchanan tells us that every speaker in the Houses of Parliament was careful to adorn his speeches with Greek and Latin tags—'even Lord Melbourne'. All the same, Peacock has this very human tendency to air his out-of-the-way learning, which may well have sprung from some deep-seated diffidence caused by his isolation.

While the poetical Peacock was preparing himself, the satirical Peacock was keeping his eyes open. In July 1801 he sent his grandmother a rhymed letter about Sir Peter Bohea, who had started life selling plums from a barrow:[6]

> Two-pence farthing's the sum mem, can take
> nothing off it.
> If we take off a farthing we lose all our profit!

—but who later became an alderman, with a knighthood, an expensive wife, and a house in Grosvenor Square.

> He now never looks on the *bills* he's to pay,
> But only on *bills* of the opera or play;
> Each ev'ning is spent on some gala or rout,
> And when creditors call—he is sure to be out.

The Alarmists, another piece of this period, is a sort of preliminary sketch for similar scenes in several of the novels. Representatives of various trades and professions meet to moan about the war news and the government of the day. The Cook, for instance:

> Here's a very fine mess; spoke my wife, Mr Chairman
> That there Bony Part is a devilish rare man!
> We must soon go to pot, spite of all we can do;
> When I think of his sauce, I am quite in a stew.

Finally, the Chairman adjourns the meeting for a fortnight, declaring of His Majesty's Ministers:

> That for England's misfortunes they care not a feather—
> So, my friends, let us all be unhappy together.

The last line of that refrain recurs in the famous dinner to Mr Cypress in *Nightmare Abbey*. Two years later, in 1803, we get another anticipation of the future in the first of those effortless glees:

> Quickly pass the social glass,
> Hence with idle sorrow!
> No delay—enjoy today,
> Think not of tomorrow!

Life at least is but a span,
Let us taste it while we can;
Let us still with smiles confess,
All our aim is happiness!

But the most rumbustious of these early light pieces is *The Monks of St Mark*, which appeared in 1804. The poem is set in a thunderstorm:

Triumphant the tempest-fiend rides in the dark,
And howls round the old abbey-walls of St Mark.

He is wasting his time. 'The uproar within drowns the uproar without', for the monks have repaired, not to the chapel to pray, but to the refectory, where they are singing so loud that the Abbot, as a choice of evils, orders Brother Augustine to pass round the bowl:

The brother obey'd, and oh! direful mishap,
Threw its scalding contents on Jeronimo's lap!
And o'er his bare feet, as the boiling tide stream'd,
Poor Augustine fretted, Jeronimo scream'd,
While Pedro protested it vex'd him infernally,
To see such good beverage taken *externally*.
The Abbot, Francisco, then feelingly said,
'Let that poor wounded devil be carried to bed'.

Two brothers pick up Jeronimo. A third goes with them, to light the way, drops the lamp, scalds himself, and falls downstairs. One of the carriers drops his end of Jeronimo in the dark. Meanwhile the Abbot, who has been 'boozing about', hears the noise, and 'serpentines out'. He trips over Jeronimo, and falls downstairs on top of the monk already there. Out come the monks with lighted tapers, and order is restored:

They went back to their bowls, laugh'd at care and foul weather,
Till they all fell under the table together.

The Monks of St Mark, in its rowdy way, anticipates the framework of the novels—an enclosed community, enjoying good fellowship, and secure, or nearly so, against the outside world. At St

Mark's, argument against dogma being impermissible, all the monks can do is to trip over each other. From *Headlong Hall* onwards, the horseplay is superseded by the play of opinion.

By now Peacock was nineteen. Edith Nicolls has given us a description of his appearance at this age:

'There is a portrait of my grandfather taken about this time. It shows that the pretty fair-haired boy had developed into a fine, tall handsome man, with a profusion of bright brown hair, eyes of a fine dark blue, massive brow and regular features, a Roman nose, a handsome mouth, which, when he laughed, as I well remember, turned up at the corners, and a complexion fair as a girl's; his hair was peculiar in its wild luxuriant growth, it seemed to grow all from the top of his head, had no parting, but hung about in thick locks with a rich wave all through it, and as an old man, it turned to that beautifully bright silver-white, which one so seldom sees; at his death, in his eighty-first year, it was as profuse in quantity as when he was a young man.'[7]

By now, as a handsome young poet, he had, very properly, begun to serenade the ladies. In 1802–3, he was writing poems to a Miss Lucretia Oldham, of 'Shacklewell Green'. Her name appears as an acrostic, there are lines to her lap-dog, and a collection of poems is prefaced by one dedicated to 'L.O.' Another is written 'with true repentance' and asks pardon for 'presumptuously thinking an Angel can err'. Typically, he parodies himself in 'Paddy's Lamentation', addressed to 'Sweet Molly O'Bog', and another lady gets a curt dismissal:

Matilda, farewell! fate has doom'd us to part,
But the prospect occasions no pang in my heart.

There is also a letter in verse to 'Mrs de St Croix on her Recovery'. This was the mother of Marianne de St Croix, a girl of whom he was deeply fond, and of whom we shall hear more. But his main concern at this time was the preparation of a large-scale poem which would put him on the literary map. The subject he had chosen was Palmyra, the ruined city in the desert, also known as Tedmor in the

Bow then to Him, for He is Good,
　　And loves the works his hands have made;
In earth, in air, in fire, in flood,
　　His parent-bounty shines displayed.
Bow then to Him, for He is Just,
　　Though mortals scan his ways in vain;
Repine not, children of the dust!
　　For he in mercy sends ye pain.
Bow then to Him, for He is Great,
And was e'er Nature, Time, and Fate
　　Began their mystic flight;
And still shall be, when consummating flame
　　Shall plunge the universal frame
　　In everlating Night.

Bow then to Him, the Lord of All,
Whose nod bids empires rise and fall,
　　Earth, Heav'n, and Nature's Sire;
To Him, who, matchless and alone,
Has fix'd in boundless space his throne,
Unchang'd, unchanging still, while worlds and suns expire.

The lines have an Addisonian ring, or, as Mayoux less politely puts it, they could be by Charles Wesley. The revised ending of 1812, rarely printed, is a considered cancellation of the earlier one:[10]

The flower that drinks the morning dew,
　　Far on the evening gale shall fly:
The bark, that glides o'er oceans blue,
　　Dashed on the distant rocks shall lie;
The tower, that frowns in martial pride,
　　Shall by the lightning brand be riven:
The arch, that spans the summer tide,
　　Shall down the wintry floods be driven:
The tomb, that guards the great one's name,
　　Shall yield to time its sacred trust:
The laurel of imperial fame
　　Shall wither in unwatered dust.

His mantle dark Oblivion brings
Around the monuments of Kings,
Who once to conquest shouting myriads bore.
Fame's trumpet-blast, and victory's clarion shrill
Pass, like an echo of the hill,
That breathes one wild response, and then is heard no more.

But ne'er shall earthly time throw down
The immortal pile that virtue rears:
Her golden throne and starry crown,
Decay not with revolving years.
For He, whose solemn voice controlled
Necessity's mysterious sway,
And you vast orbs from chos rolled
Along the elliptic paths of day,
Has fixed her empire, vast and high,
Where primogenial harmony
Unites, in ever cloudless skies,
Affection's death-divided ties;
Where wisdom, with unwearying gaze,
The universal scheme surveys,
And truth, in central light enshrined,
Leads to the source sublime the indissoluble mind.

Peacock's was neither the first nor the last poem on ruined cities. James Grainger had been in the field with his *Ode to Solitude, Palmyra, and Tedmor* as far back as 1755. Shelley really said all there was to be said on the subject in his single sonnet, *Ozymandias*, and Lord Byron put paid to the subject in the first canto of *Don Juan*:

What are the hopes of man? Old Egypt's King
Cheops erected the first pyramid
And largest, thinking it was just the thing
To keep his memory whole, and mummy hid.
But somebody or other, rummaging,
Burglariously broke his coffin's lid:
Let not a monument give you or me hopes,
Since not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops.

All the same, *Palmyra* died hard: it is said to have turned up as a subject for a university prize poem as late as the eighteen-thirties.

In a letter written a few years later Peacock complained that *Palmyra* had been 'strangled in its birth'. But in point of fact the reviews were favourable, if patronizing. The reviewers had plenty on their hands, with a spate of elegies on the death of Nelson and the appearance of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* Even so, the *Monthly Review* found time to say: 'Fenced and barricaded as Helicon is, a few individuals occasionally contrive to clamber over the enclosure, and to get a sip from the sacred fountain. Mr Peacock appears to be one of this sacred minority'. But then came the snub of patronage: 'We will encourage him, but cautiously. He is a good poet, or as near as it is possible for a person of his inferior years and this degenerate age to be.'[11]

Also in the volume was *Fiolfar*, a poem in galloping anapaests, about a sleeping beauty of the frozen north, written after the style of the Ossianic poems of Macpherson, which were so much in vogue at the time.[12] There are also a number of shorter poems, mostly derivative, like the charming, 'To a Lady Netting':

While these bewitching hands combine
With matchless grace and silken line,
They also weave, with gentle art,
Those stronger nets that bind the heart.

More remarkable are two poems which occur in a final section called 'Nugae' (Trifles). One is totally unexpected.

Ma name'sh Levi Moshesh: I tink I vash born,
  Dough I cannot exactly remember,
In Roshemary-lane, about tree in de morn,
  Shome time in de mont of November.
Ma Fader cried 'clothesh' trough de shtreets ash he went,
  Dough he now shleeping under de shtone ish;
He made by hish bargains two hundred per shent,
  And dat way he finger'd de monish.

This enraged at least one contemporary critic, who, after a powerful royal plural, 'We are not Jews', protested violently against

the 'illiberality, buffoonery, and nonsense, of this part of the book. But it is not nonsense, nor buffoonery. Peacock's reason for including it is to be seen in the lines from Juvenal which precede it:

Sed quo divitias haec per tormenta coactas?
Cum furor haud dubius, cum sit manifesta phrenesis
Ut locuples moriaris egenti vivere fato.[13]

Uprooted from the peaceful countryside, Peacock saw in hideous contrast the rat race in the City. Levi Moses is more than a music-hall lyric. It is a statement of protest at the way of the world.

In the same final section of *Palmyra and other Poems* there are some lines entitled simply 'A Fragment'. Mayoux picks them out from the rest of the volume because he feels that here, for once, Peacock is not imitating this or that style, but writing, as he puts it, *selon sa nature*. They are not widely known, so I give them in full:

Nay, deem me not insensible, Cesario,
To female charms; nor think this heart of mine
Is cas'd in adamant; because, forsooth,
I cannot ogle, and hyperbolize,
And whisper tender nothings in the ear
Of ev'ry would-be beauty, holding out
The bright but treacherous flame of flattery,
To watch the she-moths of a drawing-room
Sport round the beam, and burn their pretty wings,
Ere conscious of their danger: yet, believe me,
I love a maid whose untranscended form
Is yet less lovely than her spotless mind.
With modest frankness, unaffected genius,
Unchang'd good humour, beauty void of art,
And polish'd wit that seeks not to offend,
And winning smiles that seek not to betray,
She charms the sight, and fascinates the soul.
Where dwells this matchless nymph? alas, Cesario,
'Tis but a sickly creature of my fancy,
Unparallel'd in nature.

Who was she? Perhaps, says Mayoux, a Greek statue. So sighed Romeo before he met Juliet. But very soon, Peacock was going to be hurt: a Greek statue was to come to life.

Chapter Three

DISENCHANTMENT

On 10 December 1805, old Captain Love of Gogmoor Hall, Chertsey, 'tossed off his last bumper' and 'sang his last stave'.[1] Presumably it was then that Sarah Love went back to Chertsey to look after his widow, who survived him by five years, and Peacock joined him there when his studies did not keep him in London. The first evidence of his return is a letter from Chertsey of 3 August 1807 to Edward Hookham. This was the younger of the two sons of Thomas Hookham, a well-known bookseller and publisher of Old Bond Street, London. The contact with the Hookhams was important to Peacock in a number of ways. After *Palmyra*, and with the exception of two children's poems, they published all his works for nearly the next thirty years. What is more, Thomas Hookham senior had come into money, and had founded his 'Literary Assembly', where writers had access to home and foreign periodicals and could meet the literary figures of the day. It was through the Hookhams, in 1812, that Peacock met Shelley.

Peacock could also make use of the Hookhams' large lending library.[2] In the letter mentioned, he asked Edward Hookham to send him 'Volney's *Voyage en Syrie*, No. 17469', and '*Montesquieu sur le Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*, No. 16218'. Peacock could thus carry on with his studies in the countryside. The letter is in formal, rather diffident terms:

> My dear Sir,
>
> I know not how to thank you for your numerous favours . . . but I shall avail myself of your generous offer and put my little vessel again on the stocks.

This was a reference to his new project, a poem to be called *The Genius of the Thames:*

> I have some thought of arranging the poem in four divisions, but of this more hereafter. Perhaps I have partaken more than I can perform, and shall be obliged at last to leave the work unfinished: however, as I have no better occupation, I shall return to the 'idle trade' of writing verses. . . . I am writing in a great hurry, and after dinner, a time at which I am not very fond of flourishing the goose-quill. Brevity, as Polonius says, is the soul of wit; but I apprehend in the present instance, it is a soul without a body.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> T. L. Peacock.

In 1806 he went for a walking tour in Scotland. At that time he was still an admirer of Sir Walter Scott, and he made the journey north to see with his own eyes the scenery about which Scott had written. In 1808, when Hookham made the same tour, Peacock was aboard H.M.S. *Venerable* and he wrote to him nostalgically:

> 'You went over the same ground on which I wandered alone in 1806. You visited Dalkeith. Is not the Esk a most delightful stream? Did you see that enchanting spot where the North and South Esk unite? . . . Did you sit by moonlight in the ruins of Melrose?[3] Did you visit the banks of the sweet silver Teviot, and that most lovely of rivers, the indescribably fascinating Tweed? Did you stand at twilight in that romantic wood which overhangs the Teviot, on the sight of Roxburgh Castle?'

Sir Walter Scott was not the only star on the northern horizon. At that time Edinburgh was on the crest of a wave. Those who could have afforded to go to the Continent could not do so, owing to the Napoleonic Wars. The few who did in the short peace of 1802 were stranded there. So Edinburgh began to regard itself, in the phrase to which Peacock so much objected, as 'the Athens of the North'. At Edinburgh University, at this time, there was a brilliant lecturer on Moral Philosophy, Dugald Stewart. His

teaching was based on a special moral sense within the individual; the existence of God was assumed, but rarely mentioned. Like Paley, in his *Evidence of Christianity* published in 1794, Stewart regarded a man's sense of duty as independent of God's command.[4] This stream of thought may well have influenced the revised ending of *Palmyra*.

Peacock returned home to a new experience. As Edith Nicolls puts it, something happened to him which 'coloured the tone of his mind for the future'. He fell in love. This was no Lucretia, and no Matilda. She was Fanny Falkner, a beautiful girl who lived with her widowed mother in the neighbourhood of Chertsey. Says Edith Nicolls:

> 'The young people were engaged when she was eighteen, and he was twenty-two. For a few months they were entirely happy in mutual affection and sympathy. Their favourite place of meeting was the old ruin of Newark Abbey.'

But then:

> 'The engagement was broken off in an unjustifiable manner by the underhand interference of a third person, and the young lady, supposing herself deserted, married another man, and died in the year 1808.'

'Something', says Richard Garnett darkly, 'probably remains to be told.' It does indeed, and for this omission we have to thank L'Estrange, the man usually so persistent in extracting information from Edith Nicolls His letters of 11 and 15 September 1874 show that Edith Nicolls's existing account took the place of an earlier and fuller one which he suppressed, but which did disclose the name. In his letter of the 15th he wrote: 'a "third party" unites wit and brevity, avoids calumny, and solves the difficulty'. In her old age, Mrs Clarke, as she was then, would only say that the third person was one of Fanny's relatives. What is certain is that Peacock sustained from it a wound which never healed throughout his life. After his death a poem was discovered among his papers, with the watermark of 1806. It was first published in Cole's edition of 1875. J. B. Priestley has described the last verse as 'a triumph'.

I dug, beneath the cypress shade,
    What well might seem an elfin's grave;
And every pledge in earth I laid,
    That erst they false affection gave.

I pressed them down the sod beneath;
    I placed one mossy stone above;
And turned the rose's fading wreath
    Around the sepulchre of love.

Frail as they love, the flowers were dead
    Ere yet the evening sun was set;
But years shall see the cypress spread
    Immutable as my regret.

There is a note here that we have not heard from Peacock before. As Professor Garrod said of A. E. Housman, a true poem has been 'wrung from him by pain'.[5] Edith Nicolls mentions other poems stemming from that same experience. For instance:

Remember me, when morning's call
    Shall bid thee leave they lonely bed:
Remember me, when evening-fall
    Shall tinge the skies with blushing red:
Remember me, when midnight sleep
    Shall set excursive Fancy free;
And should'st thou wake, and wake to weep,
    Still in thy tears remember me.

And, in *Al Mio Primore Amore*, a poem of 1813:

To many a shrine my steps have strayed,
    Ne'er from their earliest fetters free
And I have sighed to many a maid,
    Though I have never loved but thee.

He wrote another poem about her thirty years later. In this, again, he is like A. E. Housman. Indeed, the parallel is extraordinary. Both were shy, reserved men, who found in poetry a release for a

deep disturbance in their early twenties. Both were formidable classical scholars, with a special interest in out of the way authors—Peacock in Nonnus, Housman in Manilius. And, in both men, the early emotion welled up again many years afterwards. In 1936, forty years after *A Shropshire Lad*, Housman presented *More Poems*. In 1842, looking back over nearly the same interval, Peacock wrote *Newark Abbey*.[6] The memory of Fanny Falkner lasted throughout his life. Says Edith Nicolls:

'Other passing fancies, later in life, of course, fell to his lot, as they do more or less to all men, but this was a deep and lasting affection, which he retained until his death. He always wore a locket with her hair in it, and only a few days before his death he spoke of her to me, saying that he had been 'dreaming of dear Fanny', that she had come to him in the night in his sleep, and he expressed himself as greatly pleased with the dream, remarking that it had for some weeks frequently recurred.'

Olwen Campbell suggests a parallel with John Clare's obsession with Mary Joyce. In Clare's case, the obsession became a delusion:

When her small waist he strove to clasp
She shrunk like water from his grasp.[7]

Peacock knew his dreams for dreams, and was made happy by them.

After the Fanny Falkner episode, Peacock, no doubt with the help of the Love family, was appointed secretary to Admiral Sir Home Brooks Popham, aboard H.M.S. *Venerable*. This period is usually written off as a sad awakening to 'nautical realities', as against the brave tales of his old grandfather. In his letter of 28 November 1808—the same letter in which he wrote nostalgically of his Scottish walking tour—he complained to Hookham:

'As to writing poetry, or doing anything else that is rational in this floating Inferno, it is almost next to a moral impossibility. I would give the whole world now to be at home, and devote the whole winter to the composition of a comedy. I am, most assuredly, out of my element here. Why, then, do I stay? To please some

of my friends, who advise me to do so, because there is a possibility of its conducing to advantage. England is the modern Carthage; the love of gold—'the last corruption of man'—pervades the whole estate, from the centre to its extremeties.'

He seems, though, to have quite enjoyed himself at times. 'While on board the *Venerable*', wrote Edith Nicolls, 'plays were acted, for which he wrote "Prologues" and "Addresses" rather in the style of Dibden [*sic*], who inspired our sailors in fighting the French at that time'.[8] He also composed the 'Stanzas written at sea, in the North Sea on board a man-of-war':

Thou white-rolling sea! from thy foam-crested billows,
    That restlessly flash in the silver moon-beam,
In fancy I turn to the green-waving willows,
    That rise by the side of my dear native stream.
There softly in moonlight soft waters are playing,
    Which light-breathing zephyrs symphoniuusly sweep;
While here the loud wings of the north-wind are swaying,
    And whirl the white spray of the wild-dashing deep.

After this, it comes as a moment of pathos to learn from Professor Dawson that during Peacock's time aboard her, H.M.S. *Venerable* lay at anchor.[9] Even so, there were days when it was too rough for the bumboats to take off. 'I came aboard on Sunday, since when it has blown a constant gale, except during a short period on Tuesday, so that I could not send off the box before.'

In this letter, which is undated, he asks for the fourth volume of Lewis's *Romantic Tales*, *The Romance of the Forest*, *The Ring and the Well*, *Adelmon the Outlaw*, and 'something very elegantly romantesque in the poetical department'; also for *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. If there are one too many, he says, 'omit *The Romance of the Forest*,. He adds:

'What news in the republic of letters? . . . Is any new thing expected from the pen of the incomparable Southey? . . . Is Wordsworth sleeping in peace on his bed of mud in the profundity of Pathos, or will he ever again wake to dole out a lyrical ballad? . . . What tours and travels are at present most in vogue? How is Sir John

Carr getting on? What was the last act of folly, in the shape of publication, committed by Mr Pratt, or Dr Mavor, or Miss Seward, or Mr Hayley?'

In reply, Hookham must have informed him that Sir John Carr had dared to visit Scotland, and to write a *Scottish Tour*. This provoked the following, in Peacock's letter of 13 March 1809:

'Heaven preserve us! Sir John Carr on the banks of the Tweed! as wise and observing as an owl in sunshine! Sir John Carr on classical ground! Sir J. in Teviotdale! in the scenes immortalised by Scott and Leyden'. attempting to hold his farthing candle to the sun, and to meddle with things which he has neither a heart to feel nor a mind to comprehend! Rosslyn and Richmond Hill! The Firth of Forth and the Paddington Canal will be the next objects of comparison!'

With this letter he sent a draft of the *Genius of the Thames*, adding a postscript to say that he had 'been guilty of a horrible piece of vandalism in omitting to mention Runnymead or Copper's Hill', and enclosing some additional lines. This, observes Martin Freeman, is the private working of what is represented in the poem as the descent of the divine Muse at each place visited.

That is the last letter we have from aboard the man-of-war. On 3 April, he wrote jubilantly from Ramsgate·

My dear Edward,

I shall be in London in a day or two. I have sent a trunk and two boxes to your care; which if you will have the goodness to take in and pay the carriage, you will particularly oblige me. I walked hither today from Deal, and have cast anchor for the evening. Tomorrow I shall walk round the North Foreland to Margate; from thence I shall proceed to Canterbury, and, after devoting an hour or two to the cathedral and Thomas à Beckett, commit my carcase to the first leathern bucket I can find bound for London.

The 'leathern bucket', also called the 'basket', was, as Cole explains, an appendage for cheap travel at the back of the stage-coach. Back in Chertsey, he decided to finish *The Genius of the*

Thames by tracing the river from its source. 'What do you think of this scheme?', he wrote to Hookham. 'The course of the river, from Trewsbury Mead to Chertsey, is 180 miles, a very decent walk'. A weekend meeting with Hookham at the Wheatsheaf Inn, a walk over to Slough on the Monday morning, and he was on his way aboard 'the rostrum of one of the Gloucestershire coaches'. On 2 July, he wrote to Hookham from Cricklade, 'the shabbiest place in England': 'Several streams unite here: the natives are not agreed which is the Thames; they are the most perfect set of Vandals I ever met. In their vulgar ideas, the canal is the most interesting object.'[10]

Even the local vicar could not help—he was too preoccupied with his honeymoon. This ill-tempered letter from Cricklade ends: 'I slept last night in a nice airy room, with plenty of apertures on all sides for the admission of fresh air. NB—Blew a hurricane.'

But four days later he wrote to Hookham to say that despite local indifference, he had solved the problem:

> 'Thames Head is a flat spring, in a field about a mile from Tarlton, lying close to the banks of the Thames and the Severn Canal. The spring, in the summer months, is totally dry. None of our picturesque tourists seem to have asked themselves the question: How is it possible that a river which is *perpetually flowing* can rise from a source that is *sometimes dry*? The infant river at Kemble Head is never totally dry, and to the source by which the stream there is supplied can alone belong the honour of giving birth to the Thames.'

And what, he asks, is the reason for Thames Head's being sometimes dry? 'A horrible piece of machinery erected near it.' And the purpose of this machinery? 'To throw up its water into the neighbouring canal.' Reflecting upon this intrusion of man into nature, he comes to the conclusion that 'the Thames is almost as good a subject for a satire as a panegyric'.

> 'A satirist might exclaim, "The rapacity of commerce, not content with the immense advantages derived from this river in a course of nearly three hundred miles, erects a ponderous engine upon

the very place of its nativity, to suck up its unborn waters from the bosom of the earth, and pump them into a navigable canal. . . ."

'A panegyrist, on the contrary, after expatiating on the benefits of commerical navigation, might say, "And yet this splendid undertaking would be incomplete, did not this noble river, this beautiful emblem and powerful instrument of commercial greatness of Britian, contribute to that greatness even at the instant of its birth, by supplying this magnificent chain of connection with the means of perpetual utility".'

As Martin Freeman suggests, he is here sketching a possible dialogue for Mr Foster and Mr Escot in *Headlong Hall.*

After a few days with a friend at Magdalen College, Oxford, he returned home to finish the poem. It appeared in May or early June 1810. It was in two parts, each preceded by a prose analysis. Part One was to consist of: 'An autumnal night on the banks of the Thames. Eulogium of the Thames. . . . General character of the river. The port of London. The naval dominion of Britain, and extent of her commerce and navigation. . . . '

One turns the pages fearing, and finding, the worst:

And still, before thy gentle gales,
The laden bark of commerce sails:
And down thy flood, in youthful pride,
These mighty vessels sternly glide,
Destined, amid the tempest's rattle,
To hurl the thunderbolt of battle . . . .

It can only be said that there were ample precedents for this kind of thing. John Dyer had written a paean to the English wool-trade. Edward Young had versified his version of the world as a 'great exchange'. A lady named Anne Wilson had written:

The model of the drains prepare to sing,
O Sylvan Muse![11]

One thinks of the youthful Elgar having to write his ceremonial marches in order to gain serious attention. But just as there is music in his early jingoistic pieces, so there are flashes of poetry

in *The Genius of the Thames.* The best thing in the first part of the poem is the episode in which a Roman soldier, lost in the forest approaches a Druid altar. Before he sees it, he is conscious of its mysterious power.

> Sensations wild and undefined
> Rushed on the Roman warrior's mind:
> But deeper wonder filled his soul,
> When on the dead still air around
> Like symphony from magic ground
> Mysterious music stole.

The Druid priest and the Roman come to blows, and the Druid is mortally wounded:

> A sudden breeze his temples fanned:
> His harp, untouched by human hand,
> Sent forth a sound, a thrilling sound,
> That rang through all the mystic round.

We shall often find that a musical idea gives wings to Peacock's poetic imagination.

In Part Two of the poem, as Mayoux puts it, '*Il suit sa Tamise comme on suit la Seine en bateau mouche, pour voir Paris.*' Past 'Kemble's wood-embosomed spire' we go, past 'Godstow's desolated wall', where there is a brief reference to the martyrdom of the nun Rosamund. Even Oxford gets for once a favourable mention:

> Long, Oxford! may the nations see
> A second Athens rise in thee!

These lines did not survive the second edition, particularly since in his enthusiasm he credited that seat of learning not only with Locke but also with Newton, whose *alma mater* was another place. On we go past 'Windsor's royal bowers', past 'Twitnam's classic shores'[12] and 'Richmond's beauteous height' to the Medway and the 'Giant-sire's embrace'. The poem ends, as Freeman puts it, with 'ancient and honourable reflections on the flight of time'.

On the whole, the reviewers liked it. It 'claims high and unqualified applause', said the *British Critic* in August 1810. *The*

Anti-Jacobin, in September, spoke of its 'vein on pleasant poetry, and an affecting pathos, that keeps alive the interest in the heart, and disposes the mind to suitable and profitable reflections'. It also praised the brevity of the Rosamund episode, which 'a Northern bard . . . would have spun out to the length of a whole Canto'. But there was a long, hostile review in the *Satirist*, which complained that it was not, as Peacock subtitled it, a lyrical poem at all.

One gets the impression that Peacock was never satisfied with *The Genius of the Thames*. His letter to Hookham of 1807 shows that he began it without much confidence. At one point he thought of including an episode on the fall of Carthage, and then changed his mind. He began cutting and revising it before even the reviews reached him.

Professor Dawson comments that the choice of subject was not a happy one. It is too wide, and to diffuse. Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' could have taught him something about limiting his focus, but he was writing as if Wordsworth and Coleridge did not exist. The *Lyrical Ballads* had been published thirteen years before, but they had yet to make their impact. Wordsworth and Coleridge had developed because they had each other to write for. Peacock was held back by his solitude. What would have done him good at this stage would have been to stay in London and meet other writers at Hookham's 'Literary Assemblies'. Instead, even before *The Genius of the Thames* was finished, he was off to a remote part of North Wales. He was like Alice, taking the advice of the Red Queen and approaching the hill she could not reach by walking away from it. The road to North Wales was a devious path; but it led Peacock to experiences that were to affect his whole life.

Chapter Four

THE MOUNTAIN NYMPH

What led Peacock to the remote hamlet of Maentwrog in Merionethshire? Many people can look back on some occasion when, quite at random, they walked down a certain street or glanced at a certain book and so changed their whole lives. Peacock's visit to Maentwrog was his step of fate. The choice of North Wales is not surprising. The Druid episode in *The Genius of the Thames* shows that he had been attracted to Welsh folklore and mythology. He may have felt too, that, with Scotland now the virtual monopoly of Sir Walter Scott, Wales was a more promising literary hunting ground. The Grand Tour was beyond his purse, and in any case out of the question because of the war with France. A visit to Wales was fashionable. Landor had found his Ione there, and Coleridge had accidentally seen his London friend, Mary Evans, who was visiting her sister, and who was to haunt the rest of his life.[1] A dangerous place, North Wales, for a young romantic poet, as Peacock was to discover.

He went first to a town on the coast called Tremadoc, named after the vigorous and obstreperous Mr Madocks, MP for Stafford, who was at the time building a dam across the bay to protect his low-lying urban creation from the sea. There is a fine description of this view, before the dam was completed, in an early chapter of *Headlong Hall*. After a short stay at Tremadoc, Peacock moved seven miles inland to Maentwrog, which is now a reservoir, but was then a hamlet of seven houses, containing nevertheless a church and an inn, and a local parson-schoolmaster, Dr Gryffydh, described by Peacock as a 'dumpy, drunken mountain-goat'. Dr Gryffydh had two daughters, the younger of whom some years later, was to everyone's surprise to become Peacock's wife.

His first letter to Hookham from Maentwrog is dated 20 January 1810:

> 'This is a delightful spot, enchanting even in the gloom of winter: in summer it must be a terrestrial paradise . . . My sitting-room has a bow-window, looking out on a lovely river, which flows through the vale. In the vicinity are many deep glens, along which copious mountain streams of inconceivable clearness roar over rocky channels, and numerous waterfalls of the most romantic character.'

Only one thing marred this paradise—the price charged by the landlord. Whether this was adjusted, or Peacock accepted it, he decided to stay, at any rate until he was 'quite done with the Thames'. In fact he stayed there for fifteen months. On 26 February he wrote to Hookham saying that he had sent for his belongings, which were even then, he hoped, 'jumbling along in the Shrewsbury wagon'. In the same letter he asked whether *The Genius of the Thames* was now ready for publication; if so, would Hookham please send twelve copies to William de St Croix by the Homerton coach, six to his mother and six to himself. Then came another panegyric of the scenery:

> 'I wish I could find language sufficiently powerful to convey to you an idea of the sublime magnificence of the waterfalls in the forest—when the old overhanging trees are spangled with icicles, the rocks sheeted with frozen foam, formed by the flying spray; and the water, that oozes from their sides, congealed into innumerable pillars of crystal. Every season has its charms. The picturesque tourists, those birds of summer, see not half the beauties of nature.'

He hoped that, when the London opera season was over, Hookham would join him, to 'crack an egg together here—a more philosophical operation than cracking a bottle'. Then follows a request for upwards of thirty books—in French, Latin and Italian, and, amongst the English ones, the poems of Thomson, Pope, Gray, Collins, Burns, Milton and Cowper, a History of Persia, Hume's *Essays*, Zimmermann's *Solitude*, Horne Tooke's *Diversions*

of Purley, classical and modern atlases, and Gillies's *Ancient Greece*. In the next letter, dated 10 March, he explained that while waiting for these books to arrive he has been exploring the vicinity and climbing about the rocks and mountains 'with indefatigable zeal, carrying in my mind the bardic triad that the poet should have an eye that can see nature, a heart that can feel nature, and a resolution that dare follow nature'.[2] He added that in obedience to this injunction he had nearly broken his neck, but it appears from what follows that it was the dumpy little parson's neck, not his own, that had been endangered.

'The other day, I prevailed on my new acquaintance, Dr Griffith [*sic*] to accompany me at midnight to the *black cataract*, a favourite haunt of mine, about two and a half miles from hence . . . and at twenty minutes past eleven, lighted by a full-orbed moon, we sallied forth, to the no small astonishment of mine host, who protested he never expected to see us all again.

'The effect was truly magnificent. The water descends from a mountainous glen down a winding rock, and then precipitates itself in one sheet of foam, over the black base, into a capacious basin, the sides of which are all but perpendicular, and covered with hanging oak and hazel. . . . Dr Gryffydh, the other night, trusting to a rotten branch, had a fall of fifteen feet perpendicular, and but for an intervening hazel, would have been infallibly hurled to the bottom. But a similar mistake is not likely to occur in daylight.'

The mishap of the 'mountain-goat', or as Mayoux calls him, the *petit pasteur ivrogne*, fascinated Peacock. He elaborated it lovingly in *Headlong Hall*, when Mr Panscope has a remarkably complicated fall from the top of a tower on the Headlong estate. Peacock then chided Hookham for the brevity of his last letter, but he realized that 'this is the depth of the London winter, and that Tramezzani and Catalani must fill the King's Theatre on every night of the performance'. Then comes an unusually introspective piece of writing:

'There is more truth than poetry in the remark of Wordsworth that 'as high as we have mounted in delight, in our depression do

we sink as low'. You saw this exemplified in me last summer, when I was skipping about the room, singing, and playing all sorts of ridiculous antics, at others doling out staves of sorrow, and meditating on daggers and laurel water. Such is the disposition of the votaries of the muses, and, in some measure, of all metaphysicians, for the sensitive and studious are usually prone to melancholy, and the melancholy are usually subject to intervals of boisterous mirth. . . . Cratinus, Democritus, Horace, and others have opined that a certain degree of *noncomposity* is essential to the poetic character: and I am inclined to think there is considerable justice in the observation.'

We have spoken of Peacock as a typical man of Libra. He could also be compared with one of those ornamental barometers in which, as one figure comes out, the other goes in. They move in a perpetual counterpoint. So did the Peacock who wrote *The Monks of St Mark* and the Peacock who wrote *The Philosophy of Melancholy* which he was working on before this Welsh visit was over.

The next letter we have to Hookham is dated 12 June—three months later. By this time he had received a number of congratulations on *The Genius of the Thames*, which 'have almost metamorphosed me into a conceited coxcomb.' But he was cautious enough to add. 'the leaden mace of the reviewer will restore me to my senses', It is in this letter that we first hear of Jane Gryffydh. The reference is deliberately casual—in fact he prefaces it by talking about another girl altogether: 'Mary-Ann's illness, which I heard of from Homerton, almost made me ill from sympathy'.

This is Marianne de St Croix, to whose father at Homerton he had recently asked Hookham to send a dozen copies of his poem. Then he writes: 'The Caernarvonshire nymph, whom I once mentioned to you, pleased me by talking of Scipio and Hannibal, and the Emperor Otho'. In other words, he passes off this new friend as another of those charming educated young women whose company he so much enjoyed.[3] But, he adds revealingly: 'It is now a month since I saw her, and Richard is himself again'.[4]

Then he turns abruptly to other matters—misprints in the poem, passages with which he is dissatisfied, and so on. In the next letter,

dated 18 August, the reviewer's mace has fallen: 'The *Satirist*, I perceive, has done his best to pulverize me, he has brayed me without mercy in his leaden mortar. Lord help him! The fellow's ignorance is equal to his malevolence.'

The notice in The *Satirist*, which occupied a full page, has put him in a bad mood. He suggests postponing re-publication of *Palmyra* until some other work of his has 'obtained a degree of popularity . . . . The Temple of Fame must be gained by slow approaches, not taken by storm'. To add to his troubles, he is unwell, and missing a great deal of fun.

'Dolgelly Assizes are now going forward. Three balls are given, one last night, one tonight, and one on Monday. While I am writing here, a miserable invalid, by my solitary lamp, all the beaux and belles of Merioneth are capering away to the harp of Cadwallader, the fiddle of Llewllyn, and the fife and tabor of Shenkin Ap-Morgan Ap-Owen Ap-Rhys.'

Mayoux suggests that it may well have been while he was '*sentant le fagot*' on this occasion that he had the idea of taking revenge on the young men of North Wales by marrying off their girls to a bunch of London philosophers, as he does at the end of *Headlong Hall*. At the moment, he vents his spleen with an ungallant and unworthy remark about the Welsh ladies, and airs his grievances about Mr Madocks, the local worthy who was busy building his dam across the bay.

'Tremadoc races, last week, I am told, was very gay. I did not go near them. Mr MP Madocks told someone of my acquaintance he expected me. . . . As no communication had passed between us since last winter, I am at a loss to conceive what he meant by this. . . .'

And, in the postscript to the same letter:

'The aforesaid MP sent his compliments to me the other day, and hoped he should have the pleasure of seeing me at Dolgelly Assizes. I recollect once taking a bottle of ale in the pocket of a post-chaise to Ascot Heath: the cork was extracted with an enormous report, and every drop of the contents went off in a froth.

A happy emblem of Mr William Alexander Madocks. I had enough of him last winter. I shall take care to let it be long enough before I put myself in his way again.'

A few years later, Shelley and Harriet had trouble with this same Mr Madocks.[5] Peacock and Shelley had some strange bonds of sympathy.

The next and last of this group of letters is dated 9 April of the following year. When he wrote it, Peacock had already left Maentwrog and had started a walking tour home. In this letter, written from Machynlleth, he tells Hookham about his leave-taking of Jane Gryffydh:

'Your letter arrived on Sunday morning. I then gave my landlord the bill, and walked up to the parson's, as I could not leave the hall without taking leave of Jane Gryffydh—the most innocent, the most amiable, the most beautiful girl in existence. The old lady being in the way, I could not speak to her there, and asked her to walk with me to the Lodge. She was obliged to dress for church, but promised to call on the way. She did so, I told her my intention of parting that day, and gave her my last remaining copy of the *Genius* .... I then awaited my lovely friend's return from church, took a final leave of her, and started at three in the afternoon....'

There recurs, in Peacock's writing, a certain girl. This is how she appears in the unfinished fragment, *Cotswold Chace:*

'She dresses almost always in very fine cloth, usually blue, with a black hat and feather, and very neat boots, laced over a small and pretty foot .... Her complexion is, I imagine, naturally fair, but slightly embrowned by air and exercise; and there is over it a pure roseate glow of health, that makes her literally radiant. Her voice in speaking is at once soft and full, sweet and distinct, the natural articulation of sweet and unruffled thoughts ....'

It is a similar vision, similarly dressed, that Captain Chainmail sees when he is wandering in North Wales in *Crochet Castle.* Is it too fanciful to imagine that this was the picture implanted on Peacock's mind when he saw her, dressed for church, that last

Sunday morning? When he left, Jane Gryffydh neither saw him nor heard from him for eight years—and then—out of the blue, on East India House notepaper, came his proposal of marriage. But there is no hint of what was to come in his letter to Edward Hookham. Having described his leave-taking, he turns the page, as it were, and sets out to enjoy a new chapter of his life. He has found a 'pretty little lake at Tal-y-llyn', where the landlord of the Minfford Inn, 'a most original character', is also the local schoolmaster and the guide to Cader Idris. He has ascended the mountain with him, seated himself in the Giant's Chair, and looked from his 'throne of cloud o'er half the world':

> 'The view from the summit of this mountain baffles description. It is the very sublimity of nature's wildest magnificence. Beneath, the whole extent of Cardigan Bay: to the right, the immense chain of the Snowdonian mountains, partly smiling in sunshine, partly mantled in flying storms: to the left, the wide expanse of the southern principality, with all its mountain-summits below us . . . . On the top of Cader Idris, I felt how happy a man may be with a little money and a sane intellect, and reflected with astonishment on the madness of the multitude.'

All was right with the world. The weather was fine, and on his way home he had promised, so he told Hookham, to call on a Miss Scott at her uncle's seat, Bodalog. 'I have not seen her since the autumn, when I thought of setting out almost immediately.' That was how he liked to project himself, as the debonair young romantic who enjoyed the society of accomplished young women. When his cousin Harriet Love once said he ought to write a book called 'The Thousand and One Loves of Thomas Love Peacock', he had smiled and answered, 'I don't think you would be far out'.[6] But against that, remember the girl in the blue dress and look at the lines in *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, when he is writing of the wild Welsh scenery, and the same girl walks across it:

> . . . That form, ah! now too far remote!
> Whose glossy locks on ocean breezes float;
> That tender voice, whose rapture-breathing thrill
> Unheard so long, in fancy vibrates still.

Peacock might dissemble to Hookham, even to himself. But when he returned from that visit to Wales, he had left part of himself behind.

The Philosophy of Melancholy, on which he was working in North Wales and which he completed on his return, is sometimes brushed aside as just another of his laboured early poems. But Mayoux points out that, within his self-imposed stylistic limits, Peacock is attempting something new. His melancholy is not just a mood of emotional dejection. It is not '*L'éternelle et monotone crépusculaire parmi les ruines et les cloîtres*', nor '*un de ces états de dépression où tout l'univers se colore en jaune*': it is '*un mode de vision de toute la realité*'. As Peacock himself puts it in his prose analysis:

> 'The contemplation of the mutability of things prepares the mind to encounter the vicissitudes of life. The spirit of philosophical melancholy, which enjoys that contemplation, is the most copious source of virtue, of courage, and of genius. The pleasures arising from it are the most pure and permanent that man is capable of enjoying.'

The poem is in four parts. The first deals with the pleasures felt 'in every scene and sound of nature, more especially in the solemn grandeur of mountain scenery, and in the ruined magnificence of former times'. He is not, as in *Palmyra*, merely 'calling on Fancy', but on his own personal experience.

> Thee, melancholy! oft I hailed alone,
> On Moelwyn's heights and Idris' stormy throne,
> While mists and clouds, contracted or unfurled,
> Now closed from view, now half-revealed the world.

Too often, though, the stiff versification kills the image. Compare, for instance, these lines with the description of the frozen landscape already given in a letter to Hookham:

> The sheeted foam, the falling stream beneath,
> Cloth'd the high rocks with frost-work's wildest wreath;
> Round their steep sides, the arrested ooze had made
> A vast, fantastic, crystal colonnade.

The second part of the poem is concerned with melancholy in the arts: in the landscapes of Claude Lorrain and Salvato Ross, and in the poetry of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Ariosto, Euripides, Sophocles and Shakespeare.

> Can the fantastic jest, the antic mirth,
> The laugh, that charms the grosser sons of earth,
> A joy so true, so softly sweet bestow,
> As genius gathers from the springs of woe?

There is also a passage on the belief in early times in the supernatural power of music, as exemplified by Orpheus. The third part argues that 'the social affections derive from this sentiment their most endearing ties: the scenes of our childhood, the memory of departed friends'. In the prose summary of the fourth part he comes to the heart of the whole matter:

> 'The mind, familiarized to the contemplation of vicissitudes, rises superior to calamity, perceives that the existence of a certain portion of evil is indispensable to the general system of nature, and to the enlargement of human faculties; and ascends, from the observation of apparently discordant particulars, to the knowledge of that all-perfect wisdom. . . .'

Some of the concluding lines are surprising:

> No more with earth-directed eyes complain,
> But bow to him whose mercy sends thee pain.

And—

> From him all beings wake, in him they rest.

At first sight, this suggests a return to the position taken in the first version of *Palmyra*. But in a footnote he states that the Christian wording is only one enunciation of the system of *εὐ το παν* (The One is All). He quotes the Orphic fragment:[7]

> *Ζευς πρωτος γενετο, Ζευς ὑστατος αρχικεραυνες*
> *Ζευς κεφαλη, Ζευς μεσσα Διος ζἐκ παντα τετυκται*

He refers also to the Sixth Aeneid, and to the inscription on the pedestal of a veiled figure in an Indian temple: 'I am all that is,

all that was, and all that will be; and the veil which conceals me has never been raised by man'.[8]

Peacock's interest in other religions is also shown by the shorter poem which he included at the end of the volume. It is called *The Spirit of Fire, a Mythological Ode*. In it, Mahommed, propagating his new religion, violates the sanctuary of the older Zoroastrian divinity. The spirit of the mystic flame addresses him:

In final hour shall my vast waves be rolled,
 Round the revolving planetary flame . . . .

And, in a footnote, Peacock comments: '*Communis mundo superest rogus* is the common doctrine of the East, the West, and the North'.

All his life, Peacock had an obsessive horror of fire, and it is ironical, but also alarming, that a fire should have broken out in his library shortly before his death.

The contemporary reviews of *The Philosophy of Melancholy* were the customary blend of cautious praise and lofty patronage. The *Anti-Jacobin* and the *Eclectic Review* both admitted its stylistic merits, though the latter felt that there was too much 'showy finery and sweet-pretty nonsense'. This may have been a reference to his persistence, in spite of critical warnings, in the use of hyphenated words—'ever-waving', 'meteor-swiftness'. Peacock annotated a copy, evidently with the idea of a second edition, but in fact it was not reprinted until it took its place, over a hundred years later, in the Halliford edition.

On the back of a draft of *The Philosophy of Melancholy* Peacock jotted down some lines on *The Art of Modern Drama*.

Let trick and mirth nonsensically loud
Catch the perched rabble in its greasy cloud;
Whirl's o'er the stage while humorous tables fly,
And witty punch-bowls strike the canvas sky.

But, characteristically, while pouring scorn on the contemporary comic stage he was also attempting to write for it. 'The Plays of Thomas Love Peacock,' first appeared in print in 1910, edited and prefaced by A. B. Young. They consist of two farces, *The Dilettanti*

and *The Three Doctors*, and a verse play, *The Circle of Loda*. The last need not detain us. The paper is watermarked 1801,[9] and the play almost certainly belongs to the period before 1806, when he was influenced by Ossian. It consists of 900 lines, into which an enormous saga is compressed, and he probably left it aside in favour of *Fiolfar, King of Norway*, in which the line 'Loda's dark cicle and mystical stone' appears.

Of more interest are the two farces, because in both their characters and their situations they are sketch-books for the novels. *The Dilettanti* is probably the earlier. It follows the tradition of the 'play of humours', which runs from Ben Jonson through Thomas Shadwell—indeed, Shadwell wrote a play under the same title. Peacock's play, like most of his novels, is set in a country mansion, on this occasion in Warwickshire, where Gregory Comfit, 'a ploding man of business', has purchased an estate. He has brought to it his flighty young wife, who has proceeded to fill it with 'foreign fooleries'. He pretends to go to Ireland, and returns incognito, to see if there is anything afoot. There is indeed. Two gentlemen have arrived from London, to avoid the embarrassment of the London duns—one is named Tactic, and the other O'Prompt, once a tragedy player in Mr O'Tagrag's company:

O'PROMPT Oh, I was a great loss to the stage. My Coriolanus was a fine piece of acting. My Polonius was a grand performance.

TACTIC: Ridiculous!

O'PROMPT: Then you're out. My Polonius had nothing ridiculous about it. I made it quite another thing. Not a creature in the house had the impudence to laugh at me. They laughed a little, though, when I played Richard the Third. . . .

Before long, this 'abominable stage Irishman', as Freeman calls him, has created havoc. People are locked in closets, servants belaboured, furniture thrown about, musical instruments and pictures destroyed, abduction planned, and the entire household vibrates with chicanery, scandal and misunderstanding. The three Dilettanti of the title are Metaphor, a poet, Shadow, a painter, and

Chromatic, a violinist who reappears with a new violin and two new daughters in *Headlong Hall.*

The Three Doctors, which is shorter, is set in Merionethshire. This suggests a date after the Welsh visit, and the suggestion is supported by a scribble in Peacock's rough draft. He was using the blank pages of an old account book which had belonged to his father, and which is marked on the cover, 'Day Book, 1768'. In an idle moment he jotted down:

T. L. Peacock—1811
1768.
———
—43
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The following is the opening of the play:

A Spacious Apartment: the Furniture in Great Confusion: Servants putting it to Rights:

CHORUS:

Work harder and faster,
Be rubbing and scrubbing;
For fear our new master
Should give us a drubbing.

Squire Hippy, the new owner, finds that he has succeeded to a dilapidated estate. After badgering and bullying the servants, he drives them off, and sings:

Couldn't that old sot, Sir Peter,
Keep his house a little neater?
Not a sofa to recline on;
Not a table fit to dine on;
Dogs and horses all past healing;
Every servant drunk and reeling. . . .

To help restore order, he has sent for three doctors from town. The first to arrive, Dr Nicholas Narcotic, has a touch of Mr Jingle about him, and an appraising eye for Squire Hippy's daughter, Caroline:

HIPPY: Dr Narcotic—your most obedient servant. My daughter, Miss Caroline Hippy.

NARCOTIC: Sir—mem—proud of the honour—came post—own chariot—four hacks—two hundred and twenty-nine miles in thirty-three hours fifteen minutes.

CAROLINE: Were you ever in Wales before, Dr Narcotic?

NARCOTIC: Never, mem. Bad country for a physician. Climate, remarkably salubrious; people remarkably poor.

CAROLINE: For botanical pursuits, I should think, sir—

NARCOTIC: Botany, mem—true. Samples here in abundance. Botanize yourself, perhaps. Extremely happy man, mem, to assist your pursuits. Fine science, mem; the flowery vestibule of the laboratory of nature.

HIPPY: Dr Narcotic—

NARCOTIC: Sir—

HIPPY: Did you come here post to cure my complaint, or to talk nonsense to my daughter?

NARCOTIC: Nonsense, Sir! Brimstone and nitre!

CAROLINE: Excuse my father, sir, it is his way.

NARCOTIC: His way—mem—forgive any gentleman his way. Nothing more—mem—than a morbid affection of the manners, arising from bad education and quarrelsome company.

The other two arrivals are Dr Gregory Windgall, 'a doctor of Horse', and Dr Barbet, who announces himself in song:

From London town,
Where high renown
My skill doth crown,
I've rattled down;
And now present
To your content—
Good sir—your most obedient.

All ills I cure
That dogs endure;
I give them drugs,

I shave their mugs,
I comb their coats,
I cut their throats,
As you may deem expedient.

There is another Gilbertian touch when, later in the farce, an Irishman named O'Fir brandishes his revolver, and sings:

This trigger, if I pull it,
Will emancipate a bullet
That will set our quarrels right.

This Irishman establishes a precedent by falling in the water. It will be found that at least one character does this at least once in all Peacock novels. There is also a landscape gardener, Marmaduke Milestone, who reappears in *Headlong Hall*, and Squire Hippy turns up again, in slightly altered form, in *Melincourt*. One way and another, these two farces gives an appetizing foretaste of the pleasant things and preposterous people to come.

A. B. Young points out that the manuscripts of the plays, as against those of the novels, are in an unusually clear hand (a fact which, as H. L. B. Brett-Smith severely observes, does not prevent him from inaccuracies in transcribing them). They seem to have been fair copies, intended to be read with a view to stage production, and marks on the cover of the manuscript of *The Dilettanti* have been interpreted as showing that it may have been through the hands of a theatre manager. But Peacock soon tired of writing directly for the theatre. He probably found that there were too many fingers in the pie, in the way of managers and actors; and, even more, it was not in his nature to accept the severe limitations of scene and costume change. He had yet to find what Richard Garnett had called 'that original creation, the Peacock novel, which may be described as the spirit of comedy diffused in exemption from the restraints of the stage, like gas liberated by the disintegration of a solid'. It was a few years yet before he found it.

We have now reached the summer of 1812. Peacock is now twenty-seven. He has three major poems to his credit; he has also

the plays, and a number of satirical pieces. He has spent a year at sea; he has travelled in Scotland and Ireland; he has had two serious emotional experiences; and he has moved away from orthodox Christian doctrine to a philosophical position of his own. It is worth reminding ourselves that all this had happended before he met Shelley.

Chapter Five

THE BRACKNELL SET

It was unfortunate that the first poem of Peacock's which Shelley read was *The Genius of the Thames*. He was in no mood for it. In January of that year, 1812, while staying at Keswick in Cumberland to be near his friend Robert Southey, he had begun a correspondence with that extreme radical, William Godwin, the author of *Political Justice* and of *Things as They Are or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Inflamed by his contact with Godwin, Shelley had rushed off with his wife Harriet to 'redress the wrongs of Ireland', and, leaving that task uncompleted, had gone to a house, reputedly haunted, belonging to a cousin at Nangwilt in Radnorshire. From there he had gone to Lynmouth, in North Devon, where he wrote his 'Defence of Freedom'.[1] Shelley sent a copy of this to Thomas Hookham senior, who returned the compliment by sending him two volumes of Peacock's poetry, *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, which had appeared earlier that year, and *The Genius of the Thames and other Poems*, including the revised *Palmyra* and *Fiolfar*, which appeared in August On 18 August Shelley wrote from Lynmouth to Thomas Hookham:

> 'I shall take the liberty of retaining the two poems which you have sent me (Mr Peacock's), and only regret that my powers are so circumscribed as to prevent me from becoming extensively useful to your friend. The poems abound with a genius, an information, the power and extent of which I admire, in proportion as I lament the object of their application. Mr Peacock conceives that commerce is prosperity; that the glory of the British flag is the happiness of the British people; that George III, so far from having been a warrior and a tyrant, has been a patriot. To me it appears otherwise . . . .'

But then Shelly turned to the revised ending to *Palmyra*, which he declared to be 'the finest piece of poetry I ever read'. This seems surprisingly fulsome, but it has to be remembered that Shelley, still under twenty-one, was not yet the poet of *The Revolt of Islam* or of *Prometheus Unbound*. Says Olwen Campbell:

> 'There is any amount in *Queen Mab* as laboured and lifeless as Peacock's verse, but behind the stilted style one is conscious every now and then of a violent struggle going on—a struggle to break through his own limitations and find expressions for unutterable things. Behind Peacock's verse there is evident a desire to escape from the pain of too much feeling and speculation into reflection and an established philosophy.'[2]

Shelley's stay at Lynmouth came to an abrupt end. His habit of putting revolutionary documents in bottles and boxes to float out to sea had attracted the notice of the local authorities. He headed for North Wales, taking with him his wife Harriet and a friend, Helen Tinsley, who had joined them in July. They went to Tremadoc and rented a house called Tanyrallt, the property of none other than our old friend, Mr 'MP' Madocks. Shelley was at first impressed by Mr Madocks's reclamation scheme, and, after being arrested for debt and released on bail, came to London to raise money on his behalf. During this visit, he dined with the Godwins, though Mary Godwin, soon to be so important in his life, was at the time away in Scotland. It must have been during this visit that Shelley and Peacock first met.[3] After Shelley's return to Wales, Peacock, or Hookham acting for him, must have sent off his lines entitled 'Farewell to Meirion'. These were more to Shelley's liking than the flag-waving of *The Genius of the Thames*. The second half of the poem runs:

> Meirion, farewell—and ne'er again,
> My steps shall pass thy mountain reign,
> Nor long on thee my memory rest,
> Fair as thou art, unloved, unblessed.
> And ne'er may parting stranger's hand
> Wave a fond blessing on thy land.

Long as disgusted virtue flies
From folly, drunkenness, and lies:
Long as insulted science shuns
The steps of they degraded sons;
Long as the northern tempest roars,
Round their inhospitable doors.

Shelley wrote to Hookham from Tanyrallt on 3 December:

'I have read Mr Peacock's verses. Independently of their poetical nature, they are accurately descriptive of the exquisite souls by which I am encompassed. Bigotry is so universally pervading that the best are deeply tainted. . . I was speaking of Mr Peacock to a lady who knew him during his residence here. In many respects she is a woman of considerable merit; and, except in religious matters, a model of toleration. "Ah!", said she, "that Mr Peacock lived in a cottage near Tan y bwlch, associating with no one, and hiding his head like a murderer; but", she added, altering her tone to one of appropriate gravity, "he was *worse than that*, he was an *Atheist*".'

Hookham was asked to make Shelley's 'best compliments to Mr Peacock', and to convey that 'if he extends not the curse he has pronounced on Meirion to Carnarvon, we should always be happy to see him'. But before that could happen the Shelleys were on the move again. The charms of Mr Madocks had worn thin. On 13 January 1813, Harriet wrote to her friend Mrs Nugent saying: 'All the good I wrote of Mr Madocks I recant'. She had been 'dreadfully deceived'. His 'midnight revels' were a disgrace and he had ruined the shopkeepers of Tremadoc. As for his embankment, she agreed whole-heartedly with Peacock:

'The sea, which used to dash against the most beautiful rocks . . . was, to please his stupid vanity and celebrate his name, turned from its course, and we have, for a fine bold sea, which there used to be, nothing but a sandy marsh uncultivated and ugly to the view.'

From the heights, it looked as if 'a puff of wind from the would send it to oblivion with its Founder's name'. Peacock may

have been guilty of a similar piece of wishful thinking when he wrote *The Misfortunes of Elphin.*

The situation finally blew up on the night of 26 February when, according to Shelley's own account, he was shot at by an intruder. Great mystery surrounded this affair. It was generally thought in Tremadoc that Shelley had invented the incident so as to get away without paying his bills. Peacock, visiting Tanyrallt in the summer of that year, 'heard the matter much talked of'. He noticed signs of shots having been fired from inside, but not from outside the house, and was inclined to class the incident as one of Shelley's semi-delusions, of which he was to encounter plenty more. The matter was finally cleared up in a letter to *Fraser's Magazine* of June 1858, in which the writer claimed that a mountain sheep-farmer had confessed to the attack, having been provoked to it because Shelley had, on humane grounds, killed some of his sheep that were ill and suffering.

By the time Peacock made this second visit to North Wales, Dr Gryffyd was dead, and Jane and her mother had moved away from Maentwrog. He seems to have made no attempt to see her, perhaps, it has been suggested, because at the moment he had nothing to offer her. We know little about this visit, but we do get a glimpse of him, either on his way there or on his return. A friend of his, a Mrs Roebuck, a niece of Sheridan, lived at Gumley in Leicestershire. Her son was then a small boy, and this is how he remembered him:

> 'He was at the time studying Greek, was reading some Greek dramatist and a commentator, and excited the wonder of the farmers who came to the house by reading, as they said, two books at once. . . . Every day after breakfast he folded about a dozen paper boats, which he told me he was accustomed to sail or set afloat in any piece of water which he found in his walk—which walk he began as soon as the boats were made, and continued until our dinner, which was at five o'clock in the afternoon.'

The writer of that letter became the Right Honourable John Arthur Roebuck, PC, QC, MP. The 'mighty effect' which Peacock had on him was later, on his return from Canada, when Peacock,

then at East India House, introduced him to John Stuart Mill, who in turn introduced him to Jeremy Bentham.[4] Roebuck became a keen and prominent Utilitarian for the rest of his life.

When Peacock returned in the late summer of 1813, Shelley had moved to Bracknell on the edge of Windsor Forest, and invited him there. Peacock accepted, and found him with Harriet, their newly born daughter, Ianthe, and Harriet's elder sister, Eliza. He also found a remarkable assortment of people whom Shelley had met in London through the Godwins and who had now grouped themselves around him in the country. There were two daughters of a rich West Indian planter, a Mr Collins, who had died during the previous year. One of these, another Harriet, had married a French *émigré*, M. de Boinville, having run away to Gretna Green to do so. M. de Boinville had died in the retreat from Moscow, leaving his widow with a daughter, Cornelia, with whom Shelley was learning Italian. The other sister had married a Mr J. F. Newton, a cranky gentleman, of whom more in a moment. Another guest was a young barrister friend of Shelley's, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who had been sent down from Cambridge at the same time as Shelley. On the periphery of this varied company were what Hogg calls 'two or three sentimental young butchers, an eminently philosophical tinker, and several very unsophisticated medical practitioners'. Most of these people were, as Brett-Smith puts it, 'of a hobbyhorsical temper', and Peacock listened to them with great amusement.

'Most of them subscribed to Shelley's views on religion, politics, and vegetarianism. But they wore their rue with a difference. Every one of them, adopting some of the articles of the faith of their general church, had each nevertheless some predominant crochet of his or her own, which left a number of open questions for earnest and not always temperate discussion. I was sometimes irreverent enough to laugh at the fervour with which opinions utterly unconducive to any practical result were battled for as matters of the highest importance to the well-being of mankind. Harriet was always ready to laugh with me, and we thereby both lost caste with some of the more hotheaded of the party.'

This was better than jolly monks falling over each other, or stage Irishmen locking people in closets. Here was what Peacock had been looking for, his *Headlong Hall*, his *Crochet Castle*. But of all the eccentrics gathered round the table at High Elms, Bracknell, none interested him more than Mr J. F. Newton. Mr Newton shared Shelley's views on vegetarianism—he had written an essay called 'The Return to Nature, or a Defence of the Vegetable Regimen'.[5] He also had strong views about astrology, which, Peacock tells us, he had with some ingenuity combined with his vegetarianism into one all-embracing theory:

'He held that all diseases and all aberrations, moral and physical, had their origin in the use of animal food and of fermented and spirituous liquours; that the universal adoption of a diet of roots, fruits, and distilled water, would restore the golden age of universal health, purity and peace: that this most ancient and sublime morality was mystically inculcated in the most ancient Zodiac, which was that of Dendera; that this Zodiac was divided into two hemispheres, the upper hemisphere being that of the realm of Oromazes or the principle of good, the lower that of Ahrimanes or the principle of evil; that each of these hemispheres was again divided into two compartments, and that the four lines of division, radiating from the centre, were the prototype of the Christian cross.'

It is typical of Peacock that he both laughed at Mr Newton, but also gave his ideas serious consideration. Mr Newton, he tells us, 'saw the Zodiac in everything':

'I was walking with him one day on a common near Bracknell, when we came upon a public house which had the sign of the Horse-shoes. There were four in the sign, and he immediately determined that this number had been handed down from remote antiquity as representative of the compartments of the Zodiac. He stepped into the public house, and said to the landlord, 'Your sign is the Horse-shoes?' 'Yes, sir.' 'This sign has always had four horse-shoes?' 'Why, mostly, sir'. 'Not always?' 'I think I have seen three, but it is mostly four'. 'Do you know why it is mostly four?'

'Why, sir, I suppose because a horse has four legs'. He bounced out in great indignation, and as soon as I joined him, he said, 'Did you ever see such a fool?'

On the other hand, Peacock, the man of Libra, believed, as Mayoux has said, that there is some truth in everything.[6] He spent some time on an uncompleted astrological poem, *Ahrimanes*, to which we shall come in due course; and in his *Memoirs of Shelley*, written years later, he gives a full and serious account of Mr Newton's system of which the following is a summary:

1 In the first quarter, Taurus the Bull, with the torch in his mouth, is eternal light. Cancer the Crab is celestial matter, or the all-covering water. From this union, typified by Gemini the Twins, comes, in the second quarter:
2 Leo, that is Primogenial Love, mounted on a lion, who produces the pure and perfect nature of things in Virgo; with Libra, the Balance, denoting coincidences of ecliptuc with equator, and the quality of man's happy existence.
3 In the third quarter comes the first entry of evil, Celestial matter (Cancer) is changed into terrestrial matter (Scorpio). Man becomes a hunter (Sagittarius, the Archer), and pursues the animals (Capricorn, the Goat). With animal food and cooking comes all our woe.
4 In the fourth quarter, Dhavantari, or Aesculapius (Aquarius, the Waterman) rises from the sea, and with water and fruit brings back universal happiness under Aries, the Ram, whose benignant ascendency was the golden fleece of the Argonauts, and the true talisman of Oromazes.

It is probable that Peacock began work on *Ahrimanes* soon after he met Mr Newton, and that he discussed it with Shelley during their visit north in 1813. For that autumn, Shelley, to the chagrin of others of his circle, invited Peacock to the Lake District. The other members of the party were Harriet, the infant Ianthe, and Eliza. The method of transport was by chariot. This was not a poetical conception, nor a delusion. Shelley was in fact the possessor of a type of chaise known technically as a 'chariot'. Possession was,

in this case, nine tenths of the law, the other tenth being represented by bailiffs acting for Mr Charters, a coachmaker of Old Bond Street, who had not been paid for it. Somehow the chariot had been brought to Bracknell, and when the bailiffs had tracked it down, Shelley felt it was time for a change of scene, the point at issue, namely the chariot, being used as a means of dodging it. The engaging story of Shelley's chariot and its adventures has been pieced together by K. N. Cameron in his *Shelley and his Circle.*[7] He quotes the authority of the contemporary work, *A Treatise on Carriages and Harness* by William Felton, to show that they must have had a very uncomfortable journey.

One of those who resented Peacock's sudden favour with Shelley was Mrs Newton. On 21 October she wrote to Hogg:

> 'The Shelley's have made an addition to their party in the person of a cold scholar, who, I think, has neither taste nor feeling. This Shelley will perceive sooner or later, for his warm nature craves sympathy, and I am convinced he will not meet with it in his new acquaintance.'

There is a little more to this letter than meets the eye. Hogg, to whom it was addressed, had attempted to seduce Harriet, with the result that Shelley had whisked her away to the north in the winter of 1811–12. There was still a coolness between them and Mrs Newton was in fact pointing out to Hogg that the vacancy had been filled. Whether to reassure Hogg, or to annoy him, Shelley wrote to him on 21 November:

> 'Mr Peacock is on a visit with us this winter. He is a very mild, agreeable man, and a good scholar. His enthusiasm is not very ardent, not his views very comprehensive, but he is neither superstitious, ill-tempered, dogmatical, nor proud.'

Other people than Mrs J. F. Newton have been baffled, not to say ruffled, by the intimacy between Peacock and Shelley. But at the time there seems to have been no one else available to fill Shelley's need. Hogg, apart from the breach, was often away on legal business. '*Le solide, le positif, l'épais*', as Mayoux calls him, he was scarcely the sort of sensitive friend that Mrs Newton felt Shelley required.

Leigh Hunt was not yet in the picture. Coleridge might have been the man, but by some mischance they never met—a fact which Coleridge once said he had 'often bitterly regretted in his heart. Southey was an older man and well aware of it. 'Ah!', Shelley quoted him as having once said, 'when you are as old as I am you will think with me'. Shelley had visited him the previous winter, but by October 1813, a number of things had changed. Southey had abandoned his early radicalism for respectability and the laureateship; Shelley had imbibed the firewater of William Godwin. Wearing his new hat, Southey cannot have been too pleased to see his young friend. He may also have been jealous of Peacock. It was soon after this visit that Peacock ceased to speak of 'the incomparable Southey', and made the first of many attacks on him in *Sir Proteus.*

They were not long in Keswick. Having failed to find accommodation—and perhaps even hospitality—they moved on to Edinburgh. There Peacock and Shelley read the classics together: Tacitus, Cicero, and—perhaps an ingenious idea of Peacock's—Plutarch's 'Ihpolyils', an essay on vegetarianism. Whether because of lack of funds, or a cold welcome from the Scots, or both, the trip came to an end before Christmas. It had not been made easier by Shelley's growing irritation with Harriet's sister Eliza. In particular, he could not bear to see her nursing little Ianthe. But when Shelley nursed the child himself, it was Peacock's turn to get restless. He tells us in the *Memoirs* that Shelley would then crron a strange song to the child, with the words 'Yahmani, Yahmani' repeated to no recognizable tune, the nearest resemblance being to 'the second, third and fourth of a minor key: B, C, D, for example, in the key of A natural: a crochet and two quavers'. Peacock also notes that, when Shelley became excited, 'his voice was not only dissonant, like a jarring string, but he spoke in sharp fourths, the most unpleasing sequence of sounds that can fall on the human ear'—though he generously adds that when Shelley was calm, his voice was pleasant, and that to hear him reading his own poetry was a delight. One way and another, the trip cannot be accounted an entire success, but it had the effect of strengthening rather than upsetting the friendship between Peacock and Shelley.[8]

Partly, this frienship depended on the casement which Peacock

opened for Shelley on to the beauties of Greek poetry. But his immediate importance to Shelley was his instinctive understanding of him. When it came to Shelley's delusions, Peacock knew exactly how to treat them:

'On one occasion, Shelley believed he had caught elephantiasis from an old woman whom he had sat opposite in a coach. He was continually on the watch for its symptoms; his legs were to swell up to the size of an elephant's, and his skin was to be crumpled over like goose-skin. He would draw the skin of his own hands, arms, and neck very tight, and if he discovered an deviation from smoothness, he would seize the person next to him, and endeavour by a corresponding pressure to see if any corresponding pressure existed. He often startled young laides in an evening party by this singular process, which was instantaneous as a flash of lightning.'

Peacock's method of dealing with this imaginary malady was to assure Shelley, on the authority of one of his favourite Latin authors, Lucretius, that elephantiasis only existed on the banks of the Nile:

Est elephas morbus, qui propter flumina Nili
Gignitur Aegypto in media, neque praeterae usquam.

Shelley found these verses 'the greatest comfort, and when, as the days rolled on, his legs regained their proportion and his skin its smoothness, the delusion died away'. Peacock was a psychologist in advance of his time. He accepted the fact of Shelley's 'strong imaginativeness predominating over reality', and noted that 'Coleridge has written much and learnedly on this subject of ideas with the force of sensation, of which he found many examples in himself'. He very soon came to the conclusion that Shelley's vegetable diet 'entered for something into his restlessness':

'When he was fixed in a place he adhered to this diet consistently and conscientiously, but it certainly did not agree with him; it made him weak and nervous, and exaggerated the sensitiveness of his imagination. Then arose those thick-coming fancies which almost invariably preceded his change of place. While he was living from inn to inn he was obliged to live, as he said, "on what

he could get"; that is to say, like other people. When he got well under this process he gave all the credit to locomotion, and held himself to have thus benefited, not in consequence of his change of regimen, but in spite of it'.

When he got to know him better, Peacock took more positive action, as on the famous occasion of their boating trip up the Thames in the summer of 1815, when Shelley had indigestion and Peacock prescribed 'three mutton-chops, well peppered', with excellent results.

Coming back to the end of 1813, a work of Peacock's evidently written before the Scottish trip, was published, probably just in time for Christmas, in the Juvenile Library. *Sir Hornbrook, or Childe Laucelot's Expedition*, is a story in verse and pictures giving the rudiments of the alphabet, grammar, and syntax:

O'er bush and briar Childe Launcelot sprung
With ardent hopes elate;
And loudly blew the horn that hung
Before Sir Hornbrook's gate.

A footnote, the first to the poem, tells us that 'Childe, in our old ballads, often signifies a knight'; but, as Corbould's illustrations show, he is in fact a small boy who has boldly come to the castle to acquire knowledge. The drawbridge is let down, and out come Sir Hornbrook's troops, who are the members of the alphabet.

Led out by Sir Hornbrook and his men, Childe Launcelot meets Sir Article ('My name is *The*, my brothers' *A*'), Sir Substantive and Sir Pronoun. Then they march to 'Bold Sir Verb's abode'—at which point a charming footnote explains: 'A verb is a word which signifies to be, to do, or to suffer; as *I am*, *I love*, *I am loved*'. Then on to the territory of Sir Syntax and his love, Gentle Prosody: these two—

—claim'd, with high pretence,
The whole Parnassian ground,
Albeit some little difference
Between their taste was found:
Sir Syntax, he was all for sense,
And Prosody for sound.

Everybody is very amiable—except for the unsociable figure of Etymology:

—who scorned surrounding fruits;
And ever dug in deepest ground
For old and mouldy roots.

Finally:

Once more his horn Sir Hornbrook blew,
A parting signal shrill:
His merrymen all, so stout and true,
Went marching down the hill.

In writing this delightful little ballad, Peacock may, it has been suggested, have simply been thinking in terms of something that might bring in a quick return, after the failure to place his plays. There was a market for illustrated children's books at the time.[9] If this was Peacock's idea, it was a good one: *Sir Hornbrook* ran into five editions in five years, as well as being reprinted later. But it probably also relates to a scheme he had, based on his own good fortune in having had his early education in the countryside. In the Day Book which he used for rough drafts, he once sketched a Prospectus for a private school:

'The youth who, unacquainted with the country, reads in a populous city the beautiful descriptions of Homer and Virgil, derives no pleasure from the language to which his fancy yields no corresponding images: but he who under kind and helpful superintendence, amidst the wild beauties of nature, associates the ideas of the great poets with the living landscape round him, derives from the pleasures thus experienced an ardent love of letters, which accomplishes one of the great objects of education, and of which the salutary effects will be felt to the latest period of his life.'

This plan could only be pursued amongst a limited number of people, 'not so small as to exclude emulation, nor so numerous as to prevent the most sedulous attention to any individual of the establishment'. He therefore proposed to 'receive eight pupils, in

a beautiful retirement in the county of Westmorland, at a Hundred Guineas per annum'. No more is heard of this scheme, though another children's poem, *The Round Table; or King Arthur's Feast* appeared soon afterwards. In his own way, he achieved this ideal when Robert Buchanan found him, at the end of his life teaching Bojardo to Clari Williams in the sunlit garden at Lower Halliford.

Now there comes a sudden change of weather. Into the ornamental barometer retreats *Sir Hornbrook*, and out comes *Sir Proteus* This poem, labelled, and rightly, *a Satirical Ballad*, is a violent attack on Robert Southey. On 8 January, the *Courier* had printed the first four stanzas of his *Carmen Triumphale for the commencement of the year 1814*. In March came Peacock's counterblast, written under the pseudonym of 'P. M. O'Donovan, Esquire:

Oh! list to me: for I'm about
To catch the fire of Chaucer,
And spin in doleful measure out
The tale of Johnny Raw, sir.

Who, bent upon a desperate plan
To make the people stare,
Set off full speed for Hindoostan
Upon Old Poulter's Mare.

Even in Peacock's day, this needed a little explanation. 'Our hero', a footnote tells us, 'appears to have been "all naked feeling and *raw* life", like Arvala in Southey's *Curse of Kehama*'. And Old Poulter's Mare is 'the Pegasa of the Cumberland school of poetry'. Johnny Raw is riding forth to prove that he is the greatest poet that ever lived.

A wild and wondrous stave I sung,
To make my hearers weep:
But when I looked, and held my tongue,
I found them fast asleep.

No footnote here, but Hogg mentions in a letter that Shelley did precisely this at Keswick when Southey was reading his poetry to him. Enraged, Johnny Raw cries out:

Now, Proteus! rise, thou changeful seer!
 To spirit up my mare,
In every shape but those appear
 Which taste and Nature wear!

Another footnote is needed:

'It is not at all surprising that a man, under a process of moral and political metamorphosis, should desire the patronage of this multiform god, who may be regarded as the tutelary saint of the numerous and thriving sect of the Anythingarians.'

Proteus obligingly takes on a number of different shapes, in which can be seen, or guessed, a number of figures of the time. But the main targets are the fashionable poets and the critics. Three wise men go to sea in a tub, 'not to fish for the moon, but to write nonsense about her'. These are Wordsworth; Coleridge, 'the author of that irresistibly comic poem, *The Ancient Mariner*'; and a Mr Wilson, author of a work called *The Isle of Palms*, 'very loftily extolled by the *Edinburgh Review*, and very peremptorily condemned by the tribunals of common sense'.

'The whining cant and dribbling affectation of this author, with his "dear God", his "blessed creatures", and his "happy living things", which would be insufferable in a spinster half-dying with megrim, become trebly disgusting in a man, who has such fine sympathies with the animal creation, and is not only an indefatigable angler, but a cock-fighter of the first notoriety.'

An old *bête noire* is not forgotten, in a reference to a curious collection of weeds, under the facetious title of *Poems by Sir John Carr*. Proteus's last manifestation is as a minstrel of the Scottish border, whose screech so startles Pegasa that she throws Johnny Raw into the sea. Ten thousand fathoms down, he cannot escape the minstrel, until at last he escapes on a dolphin's back to a wild and lonely shore. There, a voice addresses him: he is at the end of the world, and is to join Wordsworth and Coleridge in the cave of oblivion.

Come, then, and join the apostate train
Of thy poetic stamp,
That vent for gain their loyal strain
'Mid Stygian vapours damp;
While far below, where Lethe creeps,
The ghost of Freedom sits, and weeps,
O'er Truth's extinguished lamp.

Peacock 'inscribed' *Sir Proteus* to 'the Right Honourable Lord Byron':

. . . WITH THAT ADMIRATION OF HIS POETIC TALENTS
WHICH MUST BE UNIVERSALLY
AND INEVITABLY FELT
FOR VERSIFICATION UNDECORATED WITH THE
MERETRICIOUS FASCINATIONS OF HARMONY,
FOR SENTIMENTS UNSOPHISTICATED BY THE
DELUSIVE ARDOR OF PHILANTHROPY,
FOR NARRATIVE ENVELOPED
IN ALL THE CIMMERIAN SUBLIMITY
OF THE
IMPENETRABLE OBSCURE.

Byron was unperturbed, and merely quoted Dr Johnson: 'Are we alive after all this censure?'[10] The Lake Poets preserved an aloof silence. They, too, had little to worry about. As J. B. Priestley has said, Peacock had not yet learnt that a more telling way to satirize people was to bring them onto the stage and let them make fools of themselves out of their own mouths. He was very soon to grasp this principle, and to use it with deadly effect in the novels.

Chapter Six

THE FRIEND OF SHELLEY

On 8 April 1812, a letter from Peacock appeared in the *Morning Chronicle.* In it he quoted his own translation of a speech by Phaedra, the Nurse, from the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, in whixh she laments the ills of life, but also fears that—

> . . . ignorance of those paths of dread
> Whence no returning step may tread.

Peacock made the obvious comparison with a soliloquy of Hamlet's. One wonders why he wrote this letter, and why the *Morning Chronicle* printed it. K. N. Cameron connects it with Kean's recent success as Hamlet at Drury Lane, a performance which had been reviewed by Hazlitt on 14 March. Peacock, he suggests, may have had the idea of drawing Kean's attention to his translation as a possibility for the stage.[1]

We know from a letter to L'Estrange that at this period he was also working on a passage from the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, which he used afterwards in *Rhododaphne*, and Edith Nicolls says that he may have been busy with anonymous translations from the French for the Hookhams, but his main preoccupation was with the unfinished epic poem, *Ahrimanes.* This was among the manuscripts bought by the Trustees of the British Museum from Mrs Clarke in 1903, and until then not much was known about it.[2] Cole, in his *Biographical Notes*, speaks of an unfinished First Canto, but he may have been working from hearsay. There is in fact another, finished First Canto, and half a second one, as wellas two prose summaries, one of which outlines a scheme for a poem of twelve cantos.

Once again A. B. Young was the pioneer, drawing attention

to the poem in the *Modern Language Review* of October 1908. It is written in Spenserian stanzas, suggested perhaps by Byron's *Childe Harold*, and the theme clearly proceeds from J. F. Newton's zodiacal system. It should be noted that, as shown by the scansion, the word *Ahriman* should be stressed on the first and third syllables, and that the third syllable should rhyme with 'pain', as indeed it does when used in a variant form to end a line:

> . . . the vast reality of pain
> That speaks the omnipotence of Ahriman.

Of the two prose summaries, the longer one relates to the shorter version of the poem, and vice versa. This longer one begins: 'Necessity governs the world. Subordinate to her are four principal genii: the creating, the preserving, the destroying, and the restoring spirits.' These are: El Oran, who 'poured light on chaos, from which mysterious union arose primogenial love'; Oromazes, the preserver; Ahrimanes, the destroyer; and the restoring spirit Mithra. Here are two stanzas:[3]

> She first on chaos poured the streams of light,
> And bade from that mysterious union rise
> Primordial love: the heavenly lion's might
> Bore him rejoicing through the new-born skies.
> Then glowed the infant world with countless dyes
> Of fruits and flowers, and virgin nature smiled,
> Emerging first from ancient night's disguise
> And elemental discord, vast and wild,
> Which primogenial love had charmed and reconciled.
>
> Then man arose: to him the world was given,
> Unknowing then disease, or storm, or dearth:
> The eternal balance, in the central heaven,
> Marked the free tenure of his equal birth,
> And equal right to all the bounteous earth
> Of fruit and flower, his pristine food, might yield.
> Nor private roof he know, nor blazing hearth,
> Nor marked with barrier lines the fruitful field,
> Nor learned in martial strife the uprooted oak to wield.

The prose summaries are sometimes more interesting than the verse. Here is a passage from the longer one:

'When the reign of the preserving spirit was ended, he retired with his genii to the extremities of the south, where he drew an impenetrable veil around the bowers of his repose. The mariner there glides over a boundless ocean, and seeks in vain the shores of the southern world.'

'But some of his genii come forth from time to time to mingle with mankind, knowing that through their ministry must the reign of the restorer be brought on. Thus the world is never totally abandoned by the spirits of good. Few indeed are the favoured mortals that can know and feel their influence: but to them is given an impulse of power and mind which rises triumphant over the tyranny of Ahrimanes .... Such is the picture of the virtuous man struggling with calamity.'

When we find Peacock writing like this, it comes as less of a surprise to learn that in later life he filled his study with pictures of St Catherine. The above passage may well be, amongst other things, his interpretation of the poetical genius of Shelley. The idea of the poem may very well have been discussed while the two were in the north together during the last months of 1813, after the first impact of Mr J. F. Newton. Shelley's influence is often apparent. His *saeva indignatio* finds its way into the opening of the Second Canto. The argument is that, under the reign of Ahrimanes, the influence of Oromazes may still exist somewhere:

But not in fanes where priestly curses ring,
Not in the venal court, the servile camp,
Nor where the slaves of a voluptuous king
Would fain o'erwhelm, in flattery's poison clamp,
Truth's vestal torch, and love's promethean lamp:
Not where the tools of tyrants bite the ground
Mid broken swords and steeds ensanguined tramp,
Some pampered baby's brow—may trace of him be found.[4]

The fight of mankind against evil oppression is typified in the poem by the two lovers, Darassah and Kelasris, who live on the

island of Araxes. They escape in a boat from the wrath of Kelasris's father, and find themselves involved in a series of fantastic adventures. Kelasris is put into a seraglio. They are sold as slaves by robbers, and Darassah is sent to work in a diamond mine. Later they are shipwrecked, in a storm in the Pacific, and washed ashore. Then, as their isle subsides, they are wafted away in a magic boat to the southern world.

That is the story as given in one of the two prose summaries. In the other, things do not work out so romantically. Darassah becomes tyrannical, and builds a temple to Ahrimanes; and there is a final confrontation between the genii of Oromazes and Ahrimanes, one foretelling the eventual return of good, and the other rejoicing in the present dominion of evil. Of these two versions, the first seems to be more in accord with Shelley's, and the second with Peacock's way of thinking. It is to be noticed that he prefaces the poem with two mottoes. One is: 'The devil is come among us on the earth with great power'.

This line, weakened by the substitution of the word 'wrath' for 'power', was to become Mr Toobad's comic signature theme in *Nightmare Abbey*. But when he was writing *Ahrimanes*, Peacock was not in a mood of comedy. He also used lines from his translation of Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, which he called a *Choral Ode on the Evils of Life*.

μη φυναι τον ἁπαντα νικᾳ λογον
το δ'επει φανῃ,
βηναι κειθεν ὁθεν περ ἥκει
πολυ δευτερον ὡς ταχιστα

Man's happiest lot is *not to be*;
And when we tread life's thorny steep.
Most blest are they, who, earliest free,
Descend to death's eternal sleep.

Peacock's work on *Ahrimanes* was interrupted by a dramatic summons to London from Shelley. On 14 March, realizing that Harriet was to have another child, Shelley had re-married her at St George's, Hanover Square, to confirm the previous Scottish

marriage. It seems to have been soon after this that he met Mary Godwin. Mary was the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, who had died soon after Mary's birth. Shelley fell in love with her. In the violent emotional crisis which resulted, Shelley turned to Peacock, who at once came to London to see him. He found Shelley in a state of acute distress.

> 'Nothing that I ever read in tales or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, uncontrollable passion, than that under which I found him labouring. . . . Between his old feelings towards Harriet, from whom he was not then separated, and his new passion for Mary, he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of mind "suffering, like a little kingdom, the nature of an insurrection". His eyes were bloodshot, his hair and dress disordered. He caught up a bottle of laudanum, and said: "I never part with this". He added: "I am always repeating to myself your lines from Sophocles: "Man's happiest lot is not to be".'

Peacock may well have taken Shelley's dramatics with a pinch of salt If he meant to use the luadanum, why had he waited for Peacock? Also, it had happened before. When his cousin, Harriet Grove, jilted him, he had slept with laudanum and a pistol at his side. It was a stock situation in the German-inspired romances of the time, of which Shelley himself had written a couple. Nevertheless, Peacock accepted it as a serious situation, not only for Shelley, but also for Harriet and for Mary Godwin. According to the *Memoirs*, he gently declared his admiration for Harriet as a wife. In reply, Shelley declared his hatred for her sister, Eliza, who had caused such friction on the visit to Edinburgh. Then he added, more calmly: 'Every one who knows me must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal, but she can do neither.'

Peacock was content to 'rest the explanation of his conduct on the ground on which he rested it himself—that he had found in another the intellectual qualities which constituted the ideality of the partner of his life'. He also noted that Shelley seemed to

think that 'the nobleness he ascribed to her (Harriet) would induce her to acquiesce in the inevitable transfer of his affections to their new shrine'. Shelley's motive, or one of his motives, in sending for Peacock may have been a hope that Peacock might be able, and willing, to persuade Harriet to accept this view. However, 'She did not so acquiesce, and he cut the Gordonian knot of the difficulty by leaving England with Miss Godwin on the 28th of July, 1814'.

Peacock wrote his *Memoirs of Shelley* many years later, goaded to do so by what he felt were the misrepresentations of Hogg and others. From what he wrote there are two curious omissions. There is no mention of any friction between Shelley and Eliza on the visit to Keswick and Edinburgh. Peacock, with his known views about respecting private confidences, may have regarded this as purely a domestic matter, though Shelley made no secret of it in his letters to Hogg. But also, he says explicitly that, when the crisis occurred, Shelley and Harriet were 'not then separated'. He goes further; he insists that there was —'no estrangement, no thought of a shadow of separation, till Shelley became acquainted, not long after the second marriage, with the lady who was subsequently his second wife'.

In fact, Harriet did spend a considerable time away from Shelley (perhaps because of the child and Eliza) in the early part of 1814. This was certainly unwise of her; but had the thought of a break entered her mind, she would surely not have done so. One has to remember that she was sixteen at the time, and an unsophisticated sixteen at that. K. N. Cameron's conclusion is that 'the marriage could have been saved if Shelley had been willing to save it'.[5]

Shelley and Mary set off for France at five o'clock on the morning of 28 July. They took with them Mary's half-sister, Clara Mary Jane Clairmont, or Claire, as she was called, Godwin's second wife's daughter by her first husband (the intricacies of the Godwin ménage rival those of some of the later novels of Margery Allingham). Shelley's passion for triangularity passes comprehension. It has been suggested that Claire was taken along because of her knowledge of French; but most eloping couples manage without an interpreter. Claire's mother pursued the party and caught up with them at Calais, but failed to persuade her daughter to return. The trio headed

for Switzerland. After a rough journey, during which Shelley sprained his ankle, they stopped for the night at an uncomfortable inn at Troyes. From there, on 14 August, Shelley wrote an amazing letter to Harriet asking her to join them, which included:

> 'I have written to Peacock to superintend money matters; he is expensive, inconsiderate, and cold, but surely not utterly perfidious and unfriendly and unmindful of our kindness to him; besides interest will secure his attention to these matters.'

From the time of his entanglement with Mary Godwin we get these occasional waspish references to Peacock when Shelley is writing to a third party. An immediate grievance may have been Peacock's inability, or unwillingness, to talk Harriet into the expected attitude of acquiescence. He had by this time seen Harriet, and had tactfully suggested that Mary Godwin had a great deal to commend her. Harriet had retorted that all Shelley had seen in her was the name 'Mary Wollstonecraft', and Peacock had left it at that.

Shelley and his ladies made an apparently haphazard journey about Europe, travelling at one stage by the then little-known water-bus from Lucerne to Basle. They were in fact, it has recently been pointed out, following the route of Casimir Fleetwood, the hero of William Godwin's novel of that name.[6] On 13 September they returned to England, and Shelley found it a cold homecoming; Peacock was about the only person who stood by him. William Godwin was playing the outraged father and Hookham was hostile. Shelley visited Southey and was dismayed to see, hanging in his study, a portrait of Mary Godwin's mother. According to Peacock, Southey was 'repulsive', and 'expressed his bitter regret that the daughter of that angelic woman should have been so misled'. It may have been at this chilly interview that Southey delivered the dictum, quoted later by Hogg, that 'a man ought to be able to live with any woman'. Taking a good look at the picture on the wall, Shelley must have wondered what Mary's mother was doing there.

Peacock met Mary, it seems, only after her return from the Continent, and we can imagine that his manner was correct but reserved. Hogg, on the other hand, openly admired the lady, which went far to heal the breach with Shelley. On the surface, all was well

again. We hear of walks on Hampstead Heath, and Primrose Hill, and by the Serpentine, where Shelley and Peacock shared their passion for sailing paper boats, while Hogg, who 'cordially abominated' the sport, waited cold and unamused at the lakeside.

Mary and Claire both kept diaries, and from these we hear of brave schemes being discussed (it is essential to remember all the time how young they were).[7] On 30 September, walking with Shelley on Hampstead Heath, the two girls formed a plan of 'liberating two heiresses'—these seem to have been Shelley's two sisters, Eliza and Hellen—and carrying them off to the west of Ireland. We also learn that Peacock took Shelley to visit the de St Croix house at Homerton, and that Marianne corresponded with Shelley and Mary, and visited them in London. One entry in Mary's diary hints at the possibility of marriage between Peacock and Marianne.

But that autumn there were also serious worries. Friends were in short supply, and money was not growing on trees. Once, when Shelley was walking with Peacock by the Surrey Canal, he asked him: 'Do you think Wordsworth could have written such poetry if he had ever had dealings with moneylenders?' The diaries also tell of quarrels between Shelley and the emotional Claire, with Peacock acting as peacemaker and getting small thanks for it. Shelley once wrote: 'No possible conduct of his would disturb my tranquility'—and this, if you please, is Shelley writing about Peacock, not Peacock about Shelley. On 22 October a message was received from Fanny Godwin (the daughter of William Godwin's first wife through her previous liaison with a Captain Ismay—another relationship that might have been conjured up by Miss Allingham). Fanny was still living in the Godwin household, and had been forbidden to communicate with Shelley and Mary. But now she sent word to their lodgings, warning Shelley that he was in danger of being arrested for debt.

Shelley hurried round to Peacock, who was living with his mother in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane. He now had to keep in touch with Mary by letter, with the Peacocks acting as intermediaries. There are flashes of harassed ill temper. 'Do not on any account call at Peacock's, or write to him again', runs a note of Shelley's dated 27 October; and on November 4, in answer to

a taunt of Mary's that she was a better lover in deed than he was in word, he wrote: 'Perhaps, in truth, Peacock had infected me; my disquisitions were cold—my subleties unmeaningly defined; and I am a harp responsive to every wind'.

Claire was another participant in these comings and goings, and reports that Peacock's mother was, understandably, much put out by it all.[8] Shelley's peturbation must have been increased when the deserted Harriet gave birth to a son, Charles Bysshe Shelley, and when Mary had a miscarriage early in 1815.

At the very beginning of that year there was an astonishing episode effecting Peacock. The only record of them is in Mary Godwin's diary, and even there some crucial entries have been torn out.

> Monday Jan. 2 . . . Letter from Marianne; very affecting; wishing to see Shelley.
>
> Tuesday Jan. 3 . . . Shelley goes to Marianne; hears, to his great surprise, that a rich heiress has fallen in love with Peacock and lives with him; she is very miserable; God knows why. Shelley is, on her account, and that of Miss de St Croix, who is miserable on her own account. Talk over Peacock's adventure; Shelley writes to him in the evening.
>
> Wednesday Jan. 4 . . . Letter from Marianne.
>
> Friday, Jan. 6—Walk to Mrs Peacock's with Clara.
>
> Saturday, Jan. 7—Shelley breakfasts with Hogg. Clara goes to meet him at Mrs Peacock's. She sends Hogg here.

Now comes a note in Mary's handwriting stating that some leaves are cut. There is no indication of what they contained, and the entries continue in the middle of 12 January:

> '. . . Letter from Peacock to say he is in prison; the foolish man lived up to Charlotte's expectancies, who turns out to have nothing. Her behaviour is inexplicable. There is a terrifying mystery in this affair. His debt is £40. A letter also from Gray, who knows nothing about her. This is a funny man also. Write to Peacock, and send him £2.'

In the spring of 1815 the death of Shelley's grandfather brought him financial relief. He now had a claim on the estate, and was able to take a house at Bishopsgate, near Peacock. Fortune, and the weather, smiled again.

This was the summer of the famous boating expedition up the Thames, so nearly ruined by Shelley's dyspepsia. He was living, says Peacock, 'chiefly on tea and bread and butter, drinking occasionally a spurious sort of lemonade, made of some powder in a box'. When he accepted Peacock's prescription of 'three mutton chops, well peppered', '. . . the success was obvious and immediate. He lived in my way for the rest of our expedition, rowed vigorously, was cheerful, merry overflowing with animal spirits, and had certainly one week of thorough enjoyment of life.'

It was the dry season, and when they reached Inglesham Weir, above Lechlade, the cattle were 'standing entirely across the stream, with the water scarcely covering their knees'. Shelley was all for pushing on further by canal into the Severn, but the canal dues were too costly for them. Peacock, in his characteristic way of compensating for the disappointments of real life in his novels, made the journey in his imagination years later, in the pages of *Crotchet Castle*.

Later in the summer, Charles Clairmont, Claire's brother, was with them. In a letter to his sister of 16 September he wrote 'Peacock was here when I came; with him, I was a good deal pleased from the first; I am so still, and should have been more, if Shelley had not prejudiced me . . .'.

Here is another example of Shelley's unfortunate habit of running his friend down to other people. Clairmont added,

> 'He seems an idly inclined man; indeed, he is professedly so in the summer; he owns he cannot apply himself to a study, and thinks it more benficial to him, as a human being, entirely to devote himself to the beauties of the season, while they last; he was only happy while out from morning till night.'

Peacock himself had something to say about this, a few years later, in a letter to Shelley of 30 August 1818:

NVLA DI
SINE LI

4. *Left* Robert Southey, Poet Laureate. Pencil and chalk drawing by H Eldridge Pilloried by Peacock in *Sir Proteus* and elsewhere *Right* Shelley A lithograph from the portrait by Antonio Leisman in the Florentine

1849. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of St George Hanover Square in the County of Middlesex

No.	When Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
74	August 9	George Meredith	full age	Bachelor	Gentleman	Maddox Street	Augustus Meredith	Esquire
		Mary Ellen Nicolls	full age	Spinster	—	Devonshire Street St Marylebone	Thomas Love Peacock	Esquire

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence or after ——— by me, Henry ? Blackford ? Curate

This Marriage was solemnized between us: George Meredith, Mary Ellen [illegible]

in the Presence of us: [illegible], Edw. Nicolls

5 The entry in the Marriage Register of St George's, Hanover Square for 9 August 1849, with the signatures of Peacock, Mary Ellen and George Meredith

'The mere pleasure of existence in the open air is too absorbing for the energies of active thought, and too attractive for the resolute perseverance in sedentary study to which I find the long and dreary winter so propitious . . . . I open to myself many vistas in the great forest of the mind, and reconnoitre the tracts of territory which in the winter I propose to acquire.'

Perhaps in that summer of 1815 he was idler than usual. The previous winter had been a disturbing one; now, all was peace, and he had new friends to whom he could show the countryside he had loved all his life.[9] But also, he had made a far-reaching decision, an important one, and he was waiting to learn its results. At some point, he had laid aside the unfinished *Ahrimanes* and had begun the draft of *Headlong Hall*.

Chapter Seven

HEADLONG HALL

The first of the novels begins with four passengers, strangers to each other, waking up one morning in the Holyhead Mail. After discussing and exhausting 'various knotty points of meteorology', such as that the day is 'none of the finest', they discover that they are all bound for the same point, 'namely, Headlong Hall, the seat of the ancient and honourable family of the Headlongs, of the vale of Llanberris, in Caernarvonshire'. It is then explained that, though at first sight this name may appear 'not to be truly Cambrian, like those of the Rices, and Prices, and Morgans, and Owens, and Williamses, and Evanses, and Parrys, and Joneses', the Headlongs claim 'superior antiquity to all of them, even to Cadwallader himself'. There is a family tradition that 'the founder of the family was preserved in the deluge on the summit of Snowdon, and took the name of Rhaiader, which signifies a *waterfall*', in consequence of his method of descent to the rocks of Llanberris. Later, the name Rhaiader was thought to sound like Rider, and so to suggest a commercial bagsman, so the family preserved its essential meaning by calling themselves Headlong. For the present squire, it is certainly an apt name. He does everything with great precipitation. A tumble into his own lake, owing to too much 'latitude of sail', is the first of the involuntary immersions that seem obligatory throughout the novels.

Squire Headlong 'had actually suffered certain phenomena, called books, to find their way into his house', and had then decided to surround himself with 'men of taste and philosophers'. Having found none at Oxford, he had spread his net over London, and his catch of four had 'enconced themselves in the four corners of the Holyhead mail'.

> 'These four persons were, Mr Foster, the perfectibilian; Mr Escot, the deteriorationist; Mr Jenkinson, the statu-quo-ite; and the Reverend Doctor Gaster, who, though of course neither a philosopher nor a man of taste, had so won on the Squire's fancy, by a learned dissertation on the art of stuffing a turkey, that he concluded no Christmas party would be complete without him.'

Ingenious derivations of these gentlemen's names from ancient Greek indicate their opposed, and irreconcilable, attitudes to life; Mr Foster believes in progress; Mr Escot is convinced that the world is going to rack and ruin; Mr Jenkinson sees both sides of the question, and holds the balance between the two extremes; and as for the Reverend Doctor Gaster, his name means 'belly'.[1]

An argument begins immediately: Mr Foster observes that improvements in travel are typical of progress in all walks of life. To Escot, these so-called 'improvements' are only so many links in 'the great chain of corruption which will soon fetter the whole human race'. The coach stops, and there is a cry of 'breakfast', at which Gaster alights with such eagerness that he twists his ankle. Peacock's debates often lead up to some such physical débâcle.

We are now whisked to Headlong Hall, where chaos reigns:

> 'Multitudes of packages had arrived, by land and water, from London, and Liverpool, and Chester, and Manchester, and various parts of the mountains: books, wine, cheese, globes, mathematical instruments, turkeys, telescopes, hams, tongues, microscopes, quadrants, sextants, fiddles, flutes, tea, sugar, electrical machines, figs, spices, air-pumps, . . . drawing books, palettes, oils and colours, bottled ale and porter, scenery for a private theatre, pickles and fish-sauce, patent lamps and chandeliers, barrels of oysters, sofas, chairs, tables, carpets, beds, looking-glasses, pictures, fruits and fonfections, nuts, oranges, lemons, packages of salt salmon, and jars of Portugal grapes.'

This is much better than the similar scene at the beginning of *The Three Doctors*. In the play, practical considerations made it necessary for the servants to be 'putting things to rights', to get the stage ready for the scene to follow. In the novel, the chaos is getting worse: everything is going into the wrong place—'sofas in the

cellar, chandeliers in the kitchen, hampers of ale in the drawing-room, and fiddles and fish-sauce in the library'. Back we go to the philosophers, who are now arguing about vegetarianism over their breakfast, Escot giving a remarkable interpretation of the fable of Prometheus as 'a symbolical portraiture of that disastrous epoch, when man first applied fire to culinary purposes, and thereby surrendered his liver to the vulture of disease'. Then we return to Headlong Hall, where, free from the physical restrictions of the theatre, Peacock has waved a wand, and everything is miraculously in order. This lightning change is attributed to the arrival of the squire's beautiful sister Caprioletta, another of those admirable Peacockian heroines who move coolly and elegantly through a crowd of eccentric and excitable men.

Now the guests are beginning to arrive: Marmaduke Milestone, 'the celebrated picture landscape gardener';[2] Cornelius Chromatic, the amateur fiddler with two pretty daughters, Tenorina and Graziosa; Sir Patrick O'Prism, 'a dilettante painter of high renown', and his maiden aunt, Philomela Poppyseed, 'an indefatigable compounder of novels'; Mr Cranium, the phrenologist, with 'his lovely daughter, Cephalis';[3] and Mr Panscope, who had 'run through the whole circle of the sciences, and understood them all equally well'—perhaps a reader, in his youth, of the *Monthly Preceptor*. A post-chaise arrives from the inn at Capel Carig, containing a much shaken Dr Gaster, followed by the three philosophers on foot.

At this point, romance rears its head:

> 'Miss Cephalis blushed like a carnation at the sight of Mr Escot, and Mr Escot glowed like a cornpoppy at the sight of Miss Cephalis. It was at least obvious to all observers, that he could imagine the possibility of one change for the better, even in this terrestrial theatre of universal deterioration.'

On the other hand, Cranium's complexion, when he noticed this, underwent 'several variations, from the dark red of the piony to the deep blue of the convolvulus'. It seems that Escot had been the 'received lower' of Miss Cephalis until he had laughed during one of Cranium's craniological dissertations, and that the matter had not been forgotten.

Four other guests now arrive together in a post-chaise, their extreme thinness making this economic arrangement possible without inconvenience (have we here a memory of the journey in Shelley's 'chariot' to the north?) These are:

> '. . . Two very profound critics, Mr Gall and Mr Treacle, who followed the trade of reviewers, but occasionally indulged themselves in the composition of bad poetry; and two very multitudinous versifiers, Mr Nightshade and Mr Mac Laurel, who followed the trace of poetry, but occasionally indulged themselves in the composition of bad criticism.'

And now, having assembled his cast, Peacock develops his story.

Squire Headlong kept up the old fashion of dinner at five o'clock in the afternoon. There was time for a walk before the dinner-bell, during which Marmaduke Milestone, the 'picturesque gardener', lost no time in casting a surgical eye over Squire Headlong's estate, which he observed, had 'never been touched by the finger of taste'.

> 'My dear sir . . . accord me your permission to wave the wand of enchantment over your grounds. The rocks shall be blown up, the trees shall be cut down, the wilderness and all its goats shall vanish like mist. Pagodas and Chinese bridges, gravel walks and shubberies, bowling-greens, canals, and clumps of larch, shall rise upon its ruins . . .'

The three philosophers had meanwhile climbed up on to higher ground, where they looked down (one of Peacock's favourite images) on 'a little boat which was gliding over the surface of the tranquil lake below'. This led to a discussion of ancient and modern seamanship, and, by extension, of the effects on human beings of the advancing industrial age. For Foster, 'Men are virtuous in proportion as they are enlightened'; but to Escot, 'The mass of mankind is composed of beasts of burden, mere clods, and tools of their superiors. By enlarging and complicating your machines, you degrade, not exalt, the human animals you employ to direct them.'

The next chapter takes place at the end of dinner, when 'the ladies had retired, and the Burgundy had taken two or three rounds

of the table'.[4] While the others are talking their heads off, the Squire confines himself with admirable concentration, to such injunctions as 'Push about the bottle', 'No heeltaps', or, even more laconically, 'Buz!' Even when Cranium produces the skull of Sir Christopher Wren and hands it round the table, his reaction, as he takes it, is simply, 'Memeno mori, come, a bumper of Burgundy'. Escot attacks the trade of reviewing as 'a species of shop, where panegyric and defamation are sold, wholesale, retail, and for exportation'. Mr Mac Laurel expounds current Scottish thought:

> 'It us na admetted, sir, amang the pheelosophers of Edinbroo', that there is ony [*sic*] thing as desenterestedness in the world, or that a mon can care for onything sae much as his ain sel. . . . A paisant saves a mon's life for the same reason that a hero or footpad cuts his thrapple.'

The chapter is also remarkable for its two drinking songs. Cornelius Chromatic obliges with:

> In his last binn Sir Peter lies,
> Who knew not what it was to frown:
> Death took him mellow, by surprise,
> And in his cellar stopped him down . . .

The same Sir Peter, perhaps, who, in *The Three Doctors* might have 'kept his house a little neater'.

Later, the Squire interrupts a quarrel, with the cry 'Temperance in the name of Bacchus!', and calls for a glee:

> A heeltap! a heeltap! I never could bear it!
> So fill me a bumper, a bumper of claret!
> Let the bottle pass freely, don't shirk it or spare it,
> For a heeltap! a heeltap! I never could bear it!

The old-fashioned plan of a five o'clock dinner left planty of time for music and conversation with the ladies. Mr Panscope resolved to make himself Escot's rival for the affections of the beautiful Miss Cephalis Gaster found himself listening to Philomela Poppyseed's plans for 'a very moral and aristocratic novel she was preparing for the press', and went to sleep during her recitation.

Milestone expounded to the Squire and Chromatic's daughters his ideas for touching Lord Littlebrain's park with 'the finger of taste'. Jenkinson, as Peacock might have done, 'sate by the fire, reading *Much Ado About Nothing*', and the evening ended with Miss Cephalis, at the harp, singing a song called 'Love and Opportunity', which again might be thought to echo Peacock's feelings as he looked back over his first thirty years.[5]

Oh! who art thou, so swiftly flying?
  My name is Love, the child replied:
Swifter I pass than south-winds sighing,
  Or streams, through summer vales that glide.
And who art thou, his flight pursuing?
  'Tis cold Neglect whom now you see:
The little god you there are viewing,
  Will die, if once he's touched by me.

Oh! who art thou so fast proceeding,
  Ne'er glancing back thine eyes of flame?
Marked but by few, through earth I'm speeding,
  And Opportunity's my name.
What form is that, which scowls beside thee?
  Repentance is the form you see:
Learn then, the fate may yet betide you:
  She seizes them who seize not me.

Breakfast, at Headlong Hall was a flexible affair, ready at eight, and continuing till two, so that the guests could suit themselves, the Squite only expecting them to assemble punctually for dinner. Gaster, finding himself a little queasy, preferred to breakfast in bed, on 'a mug of buttered ale and an anchovy toast'. But the three philosophers were down early, and, as it was a fine and frosty morning, Foster proposed that they should walk to Tremadoc. In a fine descriptive passage, Peacock lets them see it as it was before Mr Madock's dam had been completed.

'They walked out to the extremity of that part of it which was thrown out from the Caernarvonshire shore. The tide was now ebbing: it had filled the vast basin within, forming a lake about

five miles in length and more than one in breadth. As they looked upwards with their backs to the open sea, they beheld a scene which no other in this country can parallel, and which the admirers of the magnificence of nature will ever remember with regret, whatever consolation may be derived from the probable utility of the works which have excluded the waters from their ancient receptacle. Vast rocks and precipices, intersected with little torrents, formed the barrier on the left: on the right, the triple summit of Moelwyn reared its majestic boundary: in the depth was that sea of mountains, the wild and stormy outline of the Snowdonian chain, with the giant Wyddfa towering in the midst. The mountain-frame remains unchanged, unchangeable, but the liquid mirror it enclosed is gone.'

Before returning hime, the three philosophers had a look at the 'manufactories' in Tremadoc. To Foster, the little colony was 'a city, as it were, in its cradle'. But to Escot it has all the weakness of infancy, and all the vices of maturer age:

'Complicated machinery: behold its blessings. . . . Where is the spinning-wheel now, and every simple and insulated occupation of the industrious cottager? Wherever this boasted machinery is established, the children of the poor are death-doomed from their cradles.'

By now they had regained the shores of the lake, and their conversation was interrupted by 'a tremendous explosion, followed by a violent splashing of water'. While they were out walking, Mr Milestone had been in the grounds examining the 'capabilities of the scenery', and had noticed a ruined tower on a projecting point of rock, overgrown with ivy. He had suggested to the Squire that the effect would be improved by blowing up part of the rock with gunpowder. The Squire was not named Headlong for nothing: in all his thoughts, words, and actions, there was 'a remarkable alacrity of progression, which almost annihilated the interval between conception and execution'. Gunpowder was brought from the house, 'together with a basket of cold meat and two or three bottles of Madeira', which the Squire thought 'a very necessary

imgredient in all rural amusements'. Very soon, all was ready and the fuse lit. It was unfortunate that, at the critical moment, Panscope and Cranium should have appeared at the top of the tower from the further side to admire the view. Mr Cranium's fall, based upon Dr Gryffyd's mishap during the expedition to the black cataract, is described in loving detail:

'. . . He bounded, under the elastic influence of terror, several feet into the air. His ascent being unluckily a little out of the perpendicular, he descended with a proportionate curve from the apex of his projection, and alighted, not on the wall of the tower, but in an ivy-bush by its side, which, giving way beneath him, transferred him to a tuft of hazel at its base, which, after upholding him an instant, consigned him to the bows of an ash that had rooted itself in a fissure about half way down the rock, which finally transmitted him to the water below.'

The effect of the writing is one of slow-motion. The fall is released from actual time, and takes on the quality of an animated cartoon.[6] Cranium landed safely in the water, was rescued by Escot, plied with Madeira by the Squire, and put to bed to recover—leaving the beautiful Cephalis 'freed, that evening, from his *surveillance*', and so enabled 'to develop, to his preserver, the full extent of her gratitude'.

The finale of the novel is the Christmas ball that had been held at Headlong Hall from time immemorial. Peacock describes the North Welsh countryside being roused from its winter torpidity.

'The ivied towers of Caernarvon, the romantic woods of Tan-y-bwlch, the heathy hills of Kernioggau, the sandy shores of Tremadoc, the mountain recesses of Bedd-Gelert, and the lonely lakes of Capel-Cerig, re-echoed to the voices of the delighted ostlers and postillions, who reaped on this happy day their wintry harvest. . . .'

He also stamps this grand occasion with two highly individual episodes. After dinner, Cranium invited the guests to join him in the library in order to take a peep into 'the mechanical arcana of the anatomico-metaphysical universe'. The invitation was couched

in such elaborate language that the Welsh squires imagined they were going to see some sort of conjuring performance,[7] but when the whole party adjourned to the library they 'discovered Cranium, seated, in a pensive attitude, at a large table, decorated with a copious variety of skulls'. The method of his lecture was to compare human skulls with those of various birds and animals:

> 'Here is the skull of a Newfoundland dog. You observe the organ of benevolence, and that of attachment. Here is a human skull, in which you may observe a very striking negation of both these organs; and an equally striking development of those of destruction, cunning, avarice, and self-love. This was one of the most illustrious statesmen that ever flourished in the page of history.'

What is startling about Mr Cranium's lecture is its bitterness, particularly when he advises all parents to use such craniological comparisons before choosing a career for their sons:

> 'If the development of the organ of destruction point out a similarity between the youth and a tiger, let him be brought to some profession (whether that of a butcher, a soldier, or a physician, may be regulated by circumstances) in which he may be furnished with a licence to kill. . . . If he show an analogy with the jackal, let all possible influence be used to procure him a place at court, where he will infallibly thrive.'[8]

By this time the Squire had had enough, and ordered the musicians to strike up. After dancing, supper and several songs, an old squire led the rest in a traditional chorus 'To the immortal memory of Headlong Ap-Rhaiader, and to the health of his noble descendant and worthy representative':

> Hail to the Headlong! the Headlong Ap-Headlong!
> All hail to the Headlong, the Headlong Ap-Headlong
> The Headlong Ap-Headlong
> Ap-Breakneck Ap-Headlong
> Ap-Cataract Ap-Phystyll Ap-Rhaiader Ap-Headlong!

This chorus rang in the ears of the Squire's aunt, Miss Brindlemew Grimalkin Phoebe Tabitha Ap-Headlong. She called the

Squire to her and suggested that it was time he thought of perpetuating the Headlong name. Having coasted along so far with the merest vestige of a plot, Peacock now steps up the action in a way that could only be called preposterous, were it not that he includes among his satirical targets the novel itself.[9] With the Squire, as we have seen, to think is to act. Exclaiming 'Music hath charms!' he '—flew over to Mr Chromatic, and with a hearty slap on the shoulder, asked him how he should like him for a son-in-law'.

Chromatic was delighted with the idea, but hoped it might be Tenorina, 'for I imagine Graziosa has conceived a *penchant* for Sir Patrick O'Prism'. In this way a double marriage was arranged in 'little more than five minutes'. Caprioletta, it was learnt, had already decided to marry Foster so the Squire suggested to Escot that he should square things off by proposing to Miss Cephalis. But here came a snag. Cranium had not forgiven Escot's levity during one of his discourses, but Escot had a trump card in the shape of an enormous skull he had obtained from the local sexton, who had declared it to be the skull of none other than Cadwallader himself, on the reasoning that Cadwallader was the largest man ever born, and that it was the largest skull he had ever seen. This logic was good enough for Cranium, and a satisfactory exchange was effected, the skull becoming Cranium's and Miss Cephalis Escot's. Nor did the Squire 'suffer many days to elapse, before the spiritual metamorphosis of eight into four was effected by the clerical dexterity of the Reverend Doctor Gaster'.

As the party was dispersing, Jenkison could not resist the opportunity to point out that, according to Escot's philosophical system, he ought to condole with him on a change for the worse, adding gallantly, 'though, when I consider whom you have chosen, I should violate every principle of probability in doing so'. Escot was quite equal to this challenge:

> 'The affection of two congenial spirits, united not by legal bondage and superstitious imposture, but by mutual confidence and reciprocal virtues, is the only counterbalancing consolation in this scene of mischief and misery... luxury, despotism, and avarice have so seized and entangled nine hundred and ninety-nine out of

every thousand of the human race, that the matrimonial compact, which ought to be the most easy, the most free, and the most simple of all engagements, is become the most slavish and complicated,—a mere question of finance,—a system of bargain, and barter, and commerce, and trick, and chicanery, and dissimulation, and fraud.'

Escot's speech is a long one, echoing at times the views expressed by Shelley in *Queen Mab*. But, as he has done before, Peacock gives Jenkison the last word:

'Your theory . . . forms an admirable counterpoise to your example. As far as I am attracted by the one, I am repelled by the other. Thus, the scales of my philosophical balance remain eternally equiponderant. . . . '

The reviews, though cautious, were favourable. The *Critical Review* described the author as 'a sort of laughing philosopher', and suspected him of 'being no novice'. According to the fashion of the time, the book had been published anonymously, and all the subsequent novels were announced simply as 'By the author of *Headlong Hall*'. It ran into a second edition by August; there was an American reprint before the end of the year, a third edition in 1822, and it reappeared with three of the other novels in 1837.

There has been much argument about whether *Headlong Hall* is really a novel or not—a matter of definition which we can leave to literary criticism. Another grievance was, and is, that Peacock does not make it clear where his sympathies lie. 'One commonly closes a volume with the wish that Peacock would, like Bernard Shaw, prefix a preface to make certain just what he wants the whole thing to mean.'[10] But surely Peacock has done this: there is a motto to his book, and a very revealing one it is. It consists of four short lines from Swift:

All philosophers who find
Some favourite system to their mind
In every point to make it fit
Will force all nature to submit.[11]

To underline his intention, Peacock, towards the end mentions a long discussion between Cranium and Panscope, 'which ended, as most controversies do, by each party continuing firm in his own opinion, and professing his profound astonishment at the blindness and prejudices of the other'.

As for pinning down Peacock's own sympathies, Sir Edward Strachey, in his *Memoir*, tells us that Peacock was once told that a boy had tried to do this, but in vain. Peacock was pleased. 'That', he remarked, 'is just as it should be'. As he himself described it later, he is interested in 'the play of opinion'. But it does not follow from this, as had been suggested, that he is not interested in the truth of the ideas which he manipulates. He is, and by pushing them to the point of ridicule, he is testing their truth.[12]

It has been rightly pointed out that there was nothing particularly new in bringing people together in a country house and letting them argue. As Lord Houghton points out, it was a commonplace French *contes* of the eighteenth century. In England, the framework had been used by such writers as Sterne, Smollett, Clara Reeve, and Horace Walpole, as well as lesser-known ones like Richard Graves, Robert Bage or Thomas Avory. William Blake's unfinished *Island in the Moon* had caricatured statesmen of the day in talk and song. Peacock took over an established formula, but did something with it that nobody else had quite done before.

Critical attention has also been directed to the identification of the characters. The three philosophers are 'humorous' types on the Jonsonian pattern,[13] but, in some cases particular people are intended. Peacock makes this clear in relation to Milestone, and Philomela Poppyseed is commonly thought to be Amelia Opie, who had already come in for some harsh treatment in *Sir Proteus*. Often, though, the characters appear to be composite: George Saintsbury has observed that Mr Mac Laurel seems to be '*Quarterly* in politics and *Edinburgh* in nationality'. Cranium is interesting as representing a craze that had swept into England at the time from Germany. We hear of John Clare visiting a phrenologist at Deville's salon in the Strand, and of Coleridge submitting his head to a practitioner named Spurzheim, who announced that it lacked 'the organ of Ideality or Imagination'. Coleridge was unperturbed, and remarked

that there might be something in Spurzheim's general theory, but that when he began to map out the cranium dogmatically he fell into infinite absurdities.[14]

Carl Dawson raises the question: did Dickens over read *Headlong Hall*? The Pickwickian Christmas coach-ride to Dingley Dell makes one wonder, just as the Eatanswill episode in the same novel has affinities with the election scene at the city of One-Vote in *Melincourt*. In the late thirties, Peacock contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which Dickens was editor. 'My own guess', says Professor Dawson, 'is that Dickens knew Peacock's novels, and that he adopted a number of scenes and situations'.[15]

In the second edition of *Headlong Hall*, published in August, it was announced that the next novel, *Melincourt*, was already at the printers; but for some reason it did not appear until March of the following year. In the next chapter, we shall see some of the things which happened during the interval, and which may have accounted for the delay.

Chapter Eight

THE THREE COMPANIONS

When the fires were lit, in the autumn of 1816, it was much easier for Shelley and Peacock to work than it had been in the two years before. For once, they had leisure, and peace of mind. Hogg says the winter was a mere 'Atticism'—they 'read nothing but Greek'. Shelley learnt the validity of Peacock's opinion that no translation can ever take the place of the original language.[1] No doubt he also benefited by the short cut Peacock was then making by disregarding the Greek accents. Any who has wrestled with the perversities of proparoxytone and properispomenon will know how their complications distract from the poetry below them. They do not affect the quality of the vowels, since Greek has its separate short and long 'e' (ε,η) and 'o' (ο,ω). Peacock at this stage retained only the rough breathing, which has the force of an aspirate (ἀτ = hat).

In this matter, and others, the influence should be noted on Peacock, and thus on Shelley, of Peacock's friend, Thomas Taylor of Norwich 'Pagan' Taylor was an eccentric ranking with J. F. Newton. He had a passion for ancient Greece and Rome. Edith Nicolls retails the rumour that he 'sacrificed lambs to the immortal gods' and 'poured out libations to Jupiter' in his lodgings until his landlord threatened to turn him out. The story of the sacrifices scarcely accords with the known fact that he was, like Peacock, a great lover of animals. Taking his title from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, he wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*. More to the point, he was a great Neo-Platonist.

The long-term effect on Shelley was to wean him away from the ideas of William Godwin to the serener climate of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought. The political agitator who wrote *Queen Mab* was undergoing a metamorphosis into the poet who was to write

Prometheus Unbound.[2] Meanwhile, he was busy writing *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude.* In his *Memoirs of Shelley* Peacock records that he provided the title, which was intended to ensure that a non-classical reading public should realise that Alastor was not the hero but the evil power opposing him. But Peacock provided more than that: it almost looks as if, when Peacock laid his *Ahrimanes* aside, he handed it over to Shelley, to make any use of it he might wish. to take one example:

> The stars grow pale, and o'er the western verge
> Of heaven, the moon her parting orb suspends
> (*Ahrimanes*, II, 11)

and:

> His last sight
> Was the great moon, which o'er the western verge
> Of the wide world her mighty horn suspended
> (*Alastor*, 645–7)[3]

The ideas of *Ahrimanes* are found again in *The Revolt of Islam*, where the good and evil principles are the Eagle and the Serpent. In that poem, the youthful lovers, after extraordinary adventures in which the powers of evil have failed to separate them, are born away in an enchanted boat to a land of paradise.

As the spring came, Peacock could again show his friends the Surrey countryside. But, when he took Shelley to the Dingle, the deer were no longer there. They had been driven to the enclosed part of Windsor Forest. Act by Act, Parliament was enclosing the common land which had been for ages past the heritage of the people, for keeping a cow, or geese, or a hive of bees. 'Ye injured fields, ye once were gay', wrote John Clare, recalling the days when:

> No fence of ownership crept in between
> To hide the prospect from the gazing eye;
> The only bondage was the circling sky.[4]

To a poor countryman like John Clare, enclosure was a bitterly resented additional hardship. Peacock, though his livelihood was not immediately threatened, protested against it all his life.[5]

It was not long, Peacock tells us, before the spirit of restlessness again came over Shelley. It was encouraged by Claire Clairmont who was anxious for Shelley and Mary to go abroad again, so that she could accompany them. She had met Lord Byron at Drury Lane Theatre, and was most anxious to resume his acquaintance in Switzerland. The change of scene was preceded, Peacock tells us, 'as more than once before', by a mysterious communication to Shelley, 'seen only by himself, warning him of immediate personal perils to be incurred by him if he did not instantly depart'.

One afternoon, when Peacock went to the hall for his hat, he found Shelley's there but not his own. Shortly after that, Shelley came in with Peacock's hat in his hand, and told him that 'Williams of Tremadoc' had called. This was John Williams, the agent of John Madocks. He had come, said Shelley, to warn him of a plot against him by his father and uncle to entrap him and lock him up. Williams had been in great haste, and Shelley had walked with him to Egham. Peacock describes the subsequent conversations:[7]

> 'I said, "What hat did you wear?" He said, "This, to be sure". I said, "I wish you would put it on". He put it on, and it went over his face. I said, "You could not have walked to Egham in that hat." He said, "I snatched it up hastily, and perhaps I kept it in my hand. I certainly walked with Williams to Egham, and he told me what I have said. You are very sceptical". I said, "If you are certain of what you say, my scepticism cannot affect your certainty".... He said, "I can see Williams tomorrow if I please. He told me he was staying at the Turk's Head Coffee House, in the Strand, and should be there two days. I want to convince you that I am not under a delusion. Will you walk with me to London tomorrow—to see him?" I said, "I would most willingly do so".

The next morning they set off for London after breakfast. When they were half way down Egham Hill, Shelley turned and said:

> '"I do not think we shall find Williams at the Turk's Head". I said "Neither do I". He said, "You say that, because you do not think he has been there; but he mentioned a contingency under which he might leave town yesterday, and he has probably done so".

I said, "At any rate we should know that he has been there". He said, "I will take other means of convincing you. I will write to him. Suppose we take a walk through the forest".'

They did so, and were out all day. Shelley made another attempt to convince Peacock a few days later, but eventually no more was heard of Williams or any other mysterious visitor. The 'semi-delusion', as Peacock calls it, had passed. He concludes his version of the episode by remarking that in the expression of these differences there was 'never a shadow of anger'. They were discussed with freedom and calmness. There was 'an evident anxiety for acquiescence', but, failing it, 'a quiet and gentle toleration of dissent'.

Much has been written about the friendship of Peacock and Shelley, but not everyone notices a passage in the *Memoirs* where the two discussed it themselves. They were speaking of Wordsworth's 'Stanzas written in my pocket-copy of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*', a poem not published until 1815 but composed in May 1802. Shelley remarked how extraordinary it was that Wordsworth could have so accurately described a friendship ten years before the men met. One of Wordsworth's characters is always leaving the happy castle:

> Out of our Valley's limits he did roam;
> Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
> His voice came to us from the neighbouring height.

The other, 'A noticeable man with large gray eyes', never left the the castle. But when his friend returned from the heights 'without strength or power', it was only he who could relax him.[7]

In the same passage of the *Memoirs* Peacock tells us that Shelley saw himself in the lines of Byron's *Childe Harold:*

> On the sea,
> The boldest steer but where their ports invite:
> But there are wanderers o'er Eternity,
> Where bark drives on and on, and anchor'd ne'er shall be.

Here J. J. Mayoux has observed:

'Peacock *n'est pas un vagabond de l'éternité: sa barque n'a jamais glissé qu'entre les deux rives vertes de la Tamise, mais il s'est peut-être plus souvent qu'on ne pense penché sur le bordage pour contempler dans l'eau d'étranges reflets*'.[8]

To return to the events of 1816: at the beginning of May, Shelley left for the Continent with Mary Godwin and Claire, and they joined Lord Byron in Switzerland, en route for Italy. There were no frictions to impede Shelley's writing. Claire was occupied with Byron, and Mary was busy with her novel, *Frankenstein*. Shelley and Byron found time to go sailing. On 2 June Shelley sat down to his London lawyer, and in the letter he enclosed a draft of his Will.[9] He left £5,000 to Ianthe, 'my daughter by my wife', £2,000 to Hogg and to Byron, and to Peacock '£500 in money, and £2,000 to be laid out in an annuity for his own life, or if he pleases for his own life and that of any other person he may name'. He also left £12,000 to Mary Jane Clairmont, 'one half to be laid out in an annuity for her own life and that of any person she may name if she pleases to name any other, the other half to be at her own disposal'. The reason for the curious wording is probably that Shelley knew by then that Claire was pregnant by Lord Byron. A will was drawn up on the basis of this draft, and signed in London on 24 September.

Meanwhile, Peacock was busy with a prose work called *Calidore*. It sprang from another, shorter unfinished piece, suggested to Peacock by a book called *An Authentic Narration of Four Years' Residence in Tongataboo* by George Vason, published in 1810, with a second edition in 1815. This told of the adventures of a missionary who had voyaged to the South Pacific in the ship *Duff* and had turned apostate there. It stimulated Peacock to begin a satire called *Satyrane*·

'The missionary ship *Puff* being on its voyage to save the souls of Australiasian sinners with a large cargo of bibles and rum (it having been found by experience that the Indians will not swallow the first without the second of these commodities) was cast away on the shores of Terra Incognita, and the whole crew perished with the exception of one 'chosen vessel', who was miraculously

kept alive by special providence and the secondary cause of a cork jacket'.

This pious survivor found himself in a beautiful valley, which opened onto a natural amphitheatre, where he 'beheld a scene that made him groan in spirit, and shewed that he was in the dominion of Satan. . . . ' And there, disappointingly, after a mere two pages, this fragment breaks off. But the idea is picked up again in the longer fragment, *Calidore*—indeed several times Peacock refers to his chief character not as Calidore but still as Satyrane.

Calidore, like *Satyrane*, makes a promising begining:

> 'Notwithstanding the great improvement of machinery in this rapidly improving age, which is so much wiser, better and happier than all that went before it, every gentleman is not yet accommodated with the convenience of a pocket boat.'

For this is the peculiar possession of the godlike stranger whom Miss Ap-Nanny and her sister, Ellen, daughters of the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd, observe arriving on the Welsh shore. Having carefully folded up his boat 'in the size of a prayer book' and transferred it to his pocket, the stranger asks the way to the nearest inn, and Miss Ap-Nanny directs him, adding that on the way he will pass the house of her father, the vicar. 'Pray', says the extraordinary arrival, 'what is a vicar?'

At the inn, he finds the Vicar of Llanglasrhyd and his friend, the Rector of Bwlchpenbach, sitting either side of the fire, the points of their shoes in contact at the centre of the fender:

> 'Neither spoke nor moved, except now and then as if by some mechanism, to fill his glass from the jug of ale that stood between them on the table, and the moment this good example was set by the one the other followed it instantaneously and automatically as the two figures at St Dunstan's strike upon the bell to the great delight of Cockneys, amazement of rustics, and consolation of pick-pockets.'

Asked by Calidore to dine, the two clerics do so, saying little, and preserving their strict simultaneity throughout the evening, to

the extent of sliding gently under the table together to end the scene[10] By his invitation Calidore has gained access to the house of Miss Ap-Nanny and is discovered by her father on his knees before her. Asked by the furious vicar whether he knows that she must have a dowry of £1,000, he spills upon the floor a number of gold coins bearing the legend *Rex Arthurus.* The vicar looks at these in astonishment, 'having seen nothing but paper money for twenty years'.[11] He is equally astonished to note on the coins 'the phaenomenon of a crowned head with a handsome and intelligent face'.

When other fragments of *Calidore* came to light, it was possible to see this opening scene in relation to the rest of the story. Long before, the dominance of evil in the world had led Merlin to waft King Arthur and his Court away from it in a magic boat to an island, where they could await happier times. On this island, 'the retreat of all the gods and goddesses, genii and nymphs who formerly reigned in Olympus', they were met by Bacchus and Pan, and Bacchus informed them that, if they came with long faces, they would be banished, as Jupiter would testify from the mountain where he now lived—at which Jupiter 'gave the requisite testification by a peal of thunder'.

Life had gone on smoothly until a lean-faced stranger had arrived, announcing himself as 'a missionary of the new light'. This dismal fellow was told that he should begin by converting a priestess who lives in a cavern in the wood. The missionary said he would 'buckle on the armour of controversy', and was conducted to the cave of a beautiful wood-nymph. Nothing was heard for a month, until one night the wood-nymph appeared at the palace, followed by the 'chosen vessel', in the dress of bacchanal, his face round, his eyes sparkling, his right hand brandishing a thyrsus, his left carrying a goblet. The converter had been converted, and the result of the union was the infant Calidore.

The story then jumps ahead to a moment when Calidore, now a grown man, is sent by King Arthur to Britain on a three-fold mission—to find himself a wife, to spy out the land, and to bring back a philosopher to debate with Merlin. We have seen him accomplish the first part of this task satisfactorily in Wales. Now he goes to London, where he proceeds to the City to change his

gold coins. The gold is 'duly tried, weighed, and carefully removed from his sight, and a piece of paper is given him'. He is sent with this to another place, where he is given more slips of paper:

'"Well, sir!" said Calidore, "what am I to do with these?"—"Whatever you please, sir", said the little man, smiling. . . .

'Calidore looked at one of the pieces of paper, and read aloud: *I promise to pay Mr Henry Hare one thousand pounds—John Figginbotham*, "Well, sir; and what have I [to] do with John Figginbotham's promise to pay a thousand pounds to Henry Hare?'—"John Figginbotham, sir, having made that promise, and put it upon that paper, makes that paper worth a thousand pounds". —"To Henry Hare", said Calidore.—"To any one", said the little man. "You overlook the words: *or bearer*". "Then, sir, if you will have the goodness to direct me to John Figginbotham I will trouble him to pay me directly."—"But, good God, sir! you mistake the matter".—"Mistake, sir!"—"Yes, sir! John Figginbotham does not pay: he only signs. We pay: we, who are here: I and my chums."—"Very well, sir; then why can you not pay me without all this circumlocution?"—"Sir, I have paid you." "How, sir?"—"With those notes, sir!"—"Sir, these are promises to pay, made by one Figginbotham. I wish these promises to be performed."'[12]

Finally, Calidore attends to his third task, and looks for a philosopher. He is told there is one going cheap, called Mr Crocodile. But there the fragment ends, and we never learn who Mr Crocodile is (perhaps Coleridge) or how he would have fared with Merlin.

Shelley and his party returned to England on 7 September and Shelley passed a little time with Peacock at Marlow, in 'a period of unbroken sunshine'. Then Shelley and Mary went to Bath, to wait until a house near Peacock was ready for them. Two tragedies were to mar that peaceful autumn: Fanny Imlay, Mary Woolstonecraft's daughter by her previous liaison, committed suicide; and hard on that shock came another. Harriet had for some time been acutely depressed. Now she was missing. Shelley knew of this and was greatly worried, but when he visited London at the beginning of December he did not notice, or did not associate with himself, a

newspaper report that the body of a pregannt woman had been found in the Serpentine. He returned to Bath, elated by an appreciation that Leigh Hunt had written of him in the *Examiner*. Then he received a shattering letter from Thomas Hookham, dated 13 December:

'... While I was yet endeavouring to discover Mrs Shelley's address, information was brought me that she was dead—that she had destroyed herself.... I was informed that she was taken from the Serpentine river on Tuesday last, apparently in an advanced state of pregnancy.... She was called Harriet Smith, and the verdict was *found drowned*.'

There were conflicting reports. Some said she had taken up with a groom called Horace Smith, others that it was an army captain, but all reports agreed that whoever it was had deserted her and left her disgraced in the eyes of her family. Shelley vehemently blamed Eliza:

'There can be no question that the beastly viper her sister, unable to get profit from her connexion with me, has secured to herself the fortune of the old man who is now dying, by the murder of this poor creature.'[13]

Shelley in his distress turned to Peacock, and also to Peacock's friend, Sir Lumley Skeffington. The philosopher and the man of fashion both advised him to marry Mary at the earliest possible opportunity. This he did on 30 December at St Mildred's in the City of London.

It had been an eventful year, not only in Peacock's immediate circle, but also in the world outside. The long strain of the Napoleonic Wars and the threat of invasion were over, and the first euphoria of peace had hardened into an atmosphere of disillusion and resentment against the government. Both the influence of Shelley and the change of climate in public opinion are reflected in Peacock's next novel, *Melincourt*, which appeared in the following March.

Chapter Nine

MELINCOURT

Melincourt is over twice as long as *Headlong Hall.* Shorter, even so, than an average novel by Dickens, it gives the impression of length. This is partly because of its odd construction. Just as it appears to be coming to an end, at about the twenty-eight chapter, with the marriage of Mr Forester and Anthelia, the lady is abducted, and Mr Forester's various adventures as he searches for her—a search from which he is easily diverted—occupy fourteen chapters more. Also, there is an immense amount of talk. J. B. Priestley has said that the most attractive character in the book is Sir Oran Haut-ton, who never utters a word. There is, too, an angry tone about *Melincourt*, very different from the poised irony of *Headlong Hall*, and usually attributed to the influence of Shelley, who announced while it was being written that it was going to be even better than its predecessor. It is, say the Halliford editors, 'the only one of the seven novels to which the modern reader is disinclined to return'. It is a pity, though, to leave it out altogether. Those who skip *Melincourt* skip some of the best of Peacock.

Melincourt Castle is perched on a rocky height in Westmorland, accessible only by a narrow ledge over a tremendous chasm. This ledge:

> '... had been guarded by every impediment which the genius of fortification could oppose to the hungry Scot, who might be disposed, in his neighbourly way, to drop in without invitation and carouse at the expense of the owner, rewarding him, as usual, for his extorted hospitality, by cutting his throat and setting fire to his house.'

When these times of danger and turbulence had passed, the draw-

bridge became 'gradually divorced from its chains . . . the turrets and battlements were abandoned to the owl and the ivy'—

> '. . . and a very spacious wing was left free to the settlement of a colony of ghosts . . . notwithstanding the pious incantations of the neighbouring vicar, the Reverend Mr Portpipe, who often passed the night in one of the dreaded apartments over a blazing fire with the same invariable exorcising apparatus of a large venison pasty, a little prayer-book, and three bottles of Madeira.'

While one half of the castle was 'fast improving into a picturesque ruin', the other was as rapidly 'degenerating, in its interior at least, into a comfortable modern dwelling'. It was in these romantic surroundings that Anthelia was born, and, in Peacock's picture of her early years, there is a clear suggestion of Jane Gryffydh:

> 'Far removed from the pageantry of courts and cities, her infant attention was awakened to spectacles more interesting and more impressive: the misty moutain-top, the ash-fringed precipice, the gleaming cataract, the deep and shadowy glen, and the fantastic magnificence of the mountain clouds. The murmur of the woods, the rush of the winds, and the tumultuous dashing of the torrents, were the first music of her childhood.'

Anthelia's mother had died when she was born, but her father, Sir Henry Melincourt, had taken great care over her upbringing, 'for he was one of those who maintained the heretical notion that women are, or at least may be, rational beings'. Anthelia read Italian poetry; and when she was sixteen her father began taking her to London for the winter season. After his death, when she was twenty, she lived at Melincourt in a state of seclusion, but her beauty, and her inheritance, had been noted by the more practical brains of the metropolis As Peacock's tale begins, the Honourable Mrs Pinmoney, 'a lady of high renown in the annals of match-making', is on her way to Melincourt with her daughter, Miss Danaretta Constantina (diminutives of the Italian words for ready money), on the reasonable supposition that there will be more than enough suitors to go round.

To help her run the house, Anthelia had sent for an elderly

relative, Humphrey Hippy, Esquire, of Hypocon House in the County of Durham.[1] This allows for a little fun at the expense of Wordsworth. The servant sent from Melincourt was old Peter Gray, 'I believe a distant relation of little Lucy', and the gate of Hypocon House was opened to him by old Harry Fell, 'a distant relation of little Alice'. Chapter three, where these events take place, ends with Hippy leaping into his travelling chariot with great enthusiams, and old Peter Gray jogging slowly after him, 'philosophizing all the way in the usual poetical style of a Cumberland peasant'. Then, with cinematic freedom, Peacock switches us to a seat on the box of a four-in-hand barouche which is approaching Melincourt. The driver is one of the suitors from London, Sir Telegraph Paxarett.

On the lookout for an inn, Sir Telegraph pulls off the main road when he sees a wisp of smoke beyond the trees, but finds an ancient abbey, 'recently converted from a pile of ruins into the habitation of some variety of the human species'. Superintending the activities of some workmen is a young man whom he recognizes as old acquaintance and fellow-collegian, Sylvan Forester. 'What', asks Sir Telegraph, 'make you in Westmorland?'

> '"I have purchased this old abbey", said Mr Forester," (anciently called the abbey of Rednose, which I have altered to Redrose, as being more analogous to my notions of beauty, whatever the reverend fellows of our old college might have thought of it), and have fitted it up for my habitation. . . .'

Forester asks his friend to dine and stay the night, to talk over old times. Sir Telegraph accepts, adding.:

> '"But who is that gentleman sitting under the great oak yonder in the green coat and nankins? He seems very thoughtful".'
>
> '"He is of a contemplative disposition", said Mr Forester: "you must not be surprised if he should not speak a word during the whole time you are here. The politeness of his manner makes amends for his habitual taciturnity. I will introduce you".'

This is Sir Oran Haut-ton, Baronet. Looking at him, Sir Telegraph 'could not help thinking that there was something very

ludicrous in Sir Oran's physiognomy, notwithstanding the air of high fashion which characterized his whole deportment, and which was heightened by a pair of enormous whiskers, and the folds of a vast cravat'. As the trio entered the abbey, Sir Telegraph though, 'Possibly I may have seen an uglier fellow'.

At dinner, Sir Oran 'preserved an inflexible silence', but 'showed great proficiency in the dissection of game'. But when the wine was circulating afterwards, and he had had a glass too much, he—

'... rose suddenly from the table, took a flying leap through the window, and went dancing along the woods like a harlequin. '"Upon my word", said Sir Telegraph, "a devilish lively, pleasant fellow! Curse me if I know what to make of him".'[2]

Later, when Sir Oran has been persuaded back to bed, Forester satisfies his guest's curiosity.

MR FORESTER. 'Sir Oran Haut-ton was caught very young in the woods of Angola.'
SIR TELEGRAPH PAXARETT. 'Caught!'
MR FORESTER. 'Very young. He is a specimen of the natural and original man—the wild man of the woods, called, in the language of the more civilized and sophisticated natives of Angola, *Pongo*, and in that of the Indians of South America, *Oran Outang*.'[3]
SIR TELEGRAPH PAXARETT. 'The devil he is!'
MR FORESTER. 'Positively.'

Sir Oran had been brought up by an intelligent negro, and had had then been acquired and brought to England by Captain Hawltaught of the Tornado frigate. On the Captain's death, Forester had introduced him to London society, and, with a view to ensuring his social success, had purchased him a baronetcy and made over to him an estate.

'I have also purchased of the Duke of Rottenborough one half of the elective franchise vested in the body of Mr Christopher Corporate, the free, fat, and dependent burgess of the ancient and honourable borough of Onevote, who returns two members to Parliament, one of whom will shortly be Sir Oran.'

Meanwhile, a servant has brought in tea, and Sir Telegraph remarks that there is no sugar. Forester replies: 'I never suffer an atom of West Indian produce to pass my threshold'. This was a matter near to Peacock's heart: he himself banned sugar from his table. The point is developed into a general argument as to how far individual example can effect the practice of society. Sir Telegraph's view is that 'the world is bad enough . . . but it is not for you or me to mend it'; Forester's opinion was that 'the history of the world abounds with sudden and extraordinary revolutions in the opinions of mankind, which have been effected by single enthusiasts'. Forester then invites Sir Telegraph to his forthcoming anti-saccharine festival, which he is organizing at Redrose Abbey to demonstrate: ' . . . that the use of sugar is economically superfluous, physically pernicious, and politically abominable'.

The next morning another highly articulate gentleman arrives, in the person of Mr Fax, who is based on Malthus. He is scarcely in the room before he has led the conversation round to his pet theory.

> '"The cause", he says, "of all the evils of human society . . . is the tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence. The remedy is an universal social compact, binding both sexes to equally rigid celibacy, till the prospect of maintaining the average number of six children be as clear as the arithmetic of futurity can make it".'

Sir Telegraph takes his leave, and reaching Melincourt, finds that Anthelia has a rival suitor, Lord Anophel Achthar, son and heir of the Marquis of Agaric.[4] Attending him are a poet, Mr Feathernest (Southey) and the Reverend Mr Grovelgrub. Other arrivals are Harum O'Scarum, Esquire, 'the sole proprietor of a vast tract of undrained bog in the county of Kerry'; and Mr Derrydown, who posts about the country in a travelling chariot collecting ballads and folk songs (Sir Walter Scott). At dinner there is discussion of the virtues of the age of chivalry, and of the relative merits of *Chevy Chase* and *Paradise Lost*.

But now, in chapter ten, the mood changes. Anthelia has set out for one of her solitary walks, and the loveliness of the day has

tempted her beyond her usual limits. She has descended through a grove of pines to a place where a foaming stream is crossed by an old bridge, consisting of two planks, each stretching from one bank to an island in the centre.

'There was no breath of wind, no song of birds, no humming of insects, only the dashing of the waters beneath. She felt the presence of the genius of the scene. . . . She was roused from her reverie by sounds of music, issuing from the grove of pines, through which she had just passed, and which skirted the hollow. The notes were wild and irregular, but their effect was singular and pleasing. They ceased. Anthelia looked to the spot from which they have proceeded, and saw, or thought she saw, a face peeping through the trees . . .'

There, for a moment, we feel, with Anthelia, the pagan music of the ancient woods. She walks to the top of the hill, and gazes down on a sight that Peacock loves to describe: '. . . the margin of a lake, that seemed to slumber in the same eternal stillness as the rocks that bordered it'.

There is now an oppressive silence in the air, and a storm bursts. In a moment the little mountain rivulets have become tumultuous rivers. Anthelia scrambles down the slope, and, when she attempts to cross the bridge, the current sweeps away the planks, and she is marooned on the little island in the middle, with the water rising rapidly. But then, in the woods, she sees a strange, huge figure pull at a pine-tree and tear it out fo the ground. This is Sir Oran to the rescue, and by means of the uprooted tree-trunk he get Anthelia safely to the bank.

There are two sequels to this incident. One is a letter from a solicitor, one Richard Ratstail, instructed by his client, Laurence Litigate, Esquire, lord of the manor of Muckworthy, to bring an action against Sir Oran for 'breaking in to the manor of the said Laurence Litigate, Esquire, devastating large tracts of pineland, carrying off with force and arms some fifty loads of trunk', etc., etc. . . . This promising idea is not pursued. More important to the story, Forester calls at Melincourt and so meets Anthelia.[5] The

dinner-table talk is enlivened by a splendid pronouncement by the Reverend Doctor Portpipe:

> 'There are two reasons for drinking: one is, when you are thirsty, to cure it; the other, when you are not thirsty, to prevent it. The first is obvious, mechanical, and plebeian; the second is most refined, abstract, prospicient, and canonical. I drink by anticipation of thirst that may be. Prevention is better than cure. Wine is the elixir of life. "The soul", says St Augustine, "cannot live in drought." What is death? Dust and ashes. What is life? Spirit. What is Spirit? Wine.'
>
> MR O'SCARUM. 'And whisky.'
>
> THE REVEREND MR PORTPIPE. 'Whisky is hepatic, phlogistic, and exanthematous. Wine is the hierarchical and archiepiscopal fluid...'

In fairness, the odious Mr Feathernest is allowed his say:

> '*If you could live on roots*, said Diogenes to Aristippus, *you would have nothing to do with kings. If you could live on kings*, replied Aristippus, *you would have nothing to do with roots.* Every man for himself, sir, and God for all of us.'

The ebullient talk is rounded off, typically, with one of the best of Peacock's glees:

> In life three ghostly friars were we,
> And now three friarly ghosts we be.
> Around our shadowy table placed,
> The spectral bowl before us floats:
> With wine that none but ghosts can taste,
> We wash our unsubstantial throats.
> Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—
> three merry ghosts are we:
> Let the ocean be Port, and we'll think it good sport
> To be laid in that Red Sea.

Lord Anophel Achthar now becomes jealous at the obvious attraction between Anthelia and Mr Forester. With his toady, the Reverend Mr Grovelgrub, he attempts to kidnap the lady, but is thwarted by Sir Oran who, in another remarkable display of

strength, places both the villains on the top of a high rock, from which they cannot get down. But the main event of this first half of the book is the excursion to the borough of Onevote for the election of Sir Oran.

Travelling in Sir Telegraph's barouche, the party make their first stop at Low-wood Inn, where they find Mr Harum O'Scarum, with a newly arrived crony, Major O'Dogskin. A boating-party evokes a typical description of a lake:

> '. . . that lay in its calm expanse like a mirror, imaging with such stillness and accuracy the forms and colours of all about it, that it seemed as if the waters were withdrawn by magic, and the boats floated in crimson light between the mountains and the sky.'

But in a moment, as if to cover his romanticism, Peacock is apologizing to his readers for not tipping Anthelia into the water, 'and making the gentleman fish her out'. After various other adventures they reach the large and populous city of Novote. This city has a population of fifty thousand, but no representative in Parliament, 'the deficiency being virtually supplied by the two members for Onevote'. The second member is a Mr Sarcastic, another talkative gentleman, who has long, he says, been cured of a passion for reforming the world. 'Custom is the pillar round which opinion twines, and interest is the tie that binds it.' This idea is posed against Forester's (and Shelley's) idealistic individualism.

Now we come to the oddly disturbing chapter describing the 'election':

> 'The borough of Onevote stood in the middle of a heath, and consisted of a solitary farm, of which the land was so poor and untractable that it would not have been worth the while of any human being to cultivate it, had not the Duke of Rottenburgh found it very well worth to pay his tenant for living there, to keep the honourable borough in existence.'[6]

But, on this particular day, the borough of Onevote is a densely populated fair-ground, a circumstance arranged by Mr Sarcastic, who has drawn the crowds with carts of liquor which have pro-

ceeded with much noise and ceremony from the city of Novote. In their train have come 'persons of all descriptions':

> '. . . the bumpkin in his laced boots and Sunday coat, trudging through the dust with his cherry-cheeked lass at his elbow; the gentleman coachman on his box, with his painted charmer by his side; the lean curate on his half-starved Rosinante; the plump bishop setting an example of Christian humility in his carriage and six; the doctor on his white horse, like Death in the Revelations; and the lawyer on his black one, like the devil in the Wild Huntsmen.'

After a lengthy harangue by Mr Sarcastic, and a gracious bow from Sir Oran, the candidates are duly elected. This is done by a sign from Mr Christopher Corporate, who sits in front of an enormous marquee, a tankard in one hand and a pipe in the other. There is a cry of 'Chair 'em!' At that point '. . . the marquee opened, and a number of bulky personages, all in dress, aspect, size, and figure, very exact resemblances of Mr Christopher Corporate, each with his pipe and tankard, emerged into the daylight. . . .'

Mr Sarcastic is duly chaired by this sinister chorus, and carried away, swaying over a sea of heads, 'like a boat with one mast on a stormy ocean'. Sir Oran, with a polite bow, declines the honour.

> 'The party that was to carry him, thinking that his repugnance arose entirely from diffidence, proceeded with gentle force to overcome his scruples, when not precisely penetrating their motives, and indignant at this attempt to violate the freedom of the natural man, he seized a stick from a sturdy farmer at his elbow, and began to lay about him with great vigour and effect. Those who escaped being knocked down by the first sweep of his weapon ran away with all their might, but were soon checked by the pressure of the crowd, who, hearing the noise of conflict, and impatient to ascertain the cause, bore down from all points upon a common centre, and formed a circumferential pressure that effectually prohibited the egress of those within. . . .'

Eventually Sir Oran breaks his way through the enclosing ring to the barouche, and Forester's party drive off, the tumult of battle



6 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Canvas by R Rothwell, 1841

wafted to them on the wings of the wind as they recede: 'for the flame of discord, having once been kindled, was not extinguished by the departure of its first flambeau—Sir Oran':

> '. . . The booths were torn to pieces . . . the stalls and barrows were upset; and the pears, apples, oranges, mutton-pies, and masses of gingerbread, flew like missiles in all directions . . . till at length, everything else being levelled with the heath, they turned the mingled torrent of their wrath on the cottage of Mr Corporate, to which they triumphantly set fire, and danced round the blaze, like a rabble of village boys round the effigy of the immortal Guy. In a few minutes the ancient and honourable borough of Onevote was reduced to ashes. . . .'

This was written some years before the peasant riots and the incendiary gangs of the late 1820s, but Peacock sensed what was coming and has given in this chapter a nightmarish and prophetic picture of mob hysteria. Immediately after it, he lowers the tension by showing us Lord Anophel Achthar and the Reverend Mr Grovelgrub, still arguing on top of the rock where Sir Oran had placed them before the journey to Onevote started.[6] The scene ends in their descent 'with fearful lapse from bush to bush'.

On the way home, the party make a call at a pleasant secluded valley, where a community of cottagers live happily under the superintendence of Forester's aunt, Miss Evergreen. This lady accompanies them home to preside at the anti-saccharine fête. One or two new characters appear for this event: Mr Vamp, the reviewer; Sir Gregory Greenmould, a fat London alderman; Mr Paperstamp, a poet and friend of Mr Feathernest; and Mr Kill-the-dead, from Frogmarsh Hall, a military historian.[7] At dinner Forester calls on his guests to sign a pledge of perpetual abstinence from West Indian produce, after which Sarcastic assures him that the appeal is in vain, since 'Custom is the great lord and master of our conduct'. There then follows what appears to be a finale, in the form of a living Chess Dance, imitated from the court of Queen Quintessence in Rabelais. Waltzes, quadrilles, and country dances complete the evening, and it would seem that all that remains is for Forester and Anthelia to announce their impending marriage.

But no! Lord Anophel Achthar strikes again. A few days later, Sir Telegraph drives up furiously to Redrose Abbey with the news that Anthelia has disappeared. Forester determines 'not to rest night or day' till he has found her. In fact, he embarks on a long 'pedestrian perlustration', during which, apparently in no hurry, he deviates through a series of adventures which may, earlier on, have been envisaged for Calidore. Accompanied by Mr Fax and Sir Oran, he witnesses the failure of a paper-money bank at the town of Gullgudgeon. Then they come to the shores of a lonely lake, where they observe a gentleman stepping into a small boat.

Fax immediately recognizes 'the poeticopolitical, rhapsodixoprosaical, deisidaemoniacoparadoxographical, pseudolatreiological, transcendental meteorosophist, Moley Mystic, Esquire, of Cimmerian Lodge'—in one word, Coleridge. He invites them to cross his lake, which he calls *the Ocean of Deceitfulness*, to the *Island of Pure Intelligence*, where he lives. This is another nightmarish chapter: the island, and Cimmerian Lodge, are enveloped in deep mist. His guests ask if they may dine in the kitchen, 'which seemed to be the only spot on the *Island of Pure Intelligence* in which there was a glimmer of light'.[8] When they retire to bed, there is a gas explosion, and the house is ablaze, until Sir Oran climbs onto the roof with a tub containing one hundred and eight gallons of rain water.

Later, Sir Oran again saves the day. In an adjoining room of an hotel they hear Sir Gregory Greenmould threatening his daughter, whom he has caught with her lover on the way to Gretna Green, to avoid a forced marriage to a rich, elderly friend of her father. Sir Oran bursts in upon them—quite literally, straight through the wall-partition. Sir Gregory and his senile protégé, Sir Bonus Mac Scrip, are discomfited and the lovers escape.

But the climactic scene of this second half of the book takes place at Mainchance Villa, the new residence of Peter Paul Paperstamp, who had attended the anti-saccharine fête. With him are Mr Feathernest, Mr Vamp, Mr Killthedead and Mr Anyside Antijack (Canning). In this chapter, the arguments are taken word for word from Number XXXI of the *Quarterly Review*, which appeared in October 1816. For instance:

MR ANYSIDE ANTIJACK: 'There was a time when we could lead the people any way, and make them join with all their lungs in the yell of war: then they were people of sound judgment, and of honest and honourable feelings:[9] but when they pretend to feel the pressure of personal suffering, and to read and think about its causes and remedies—such impudence is intolerable.'

Throughout the scene, the characters chant like a litany, 'The Church is in danger! The Church is in danger!' 'Keep up that', says Mr Vamp, 'it is an infallible tocsin for rallying all the old women in the country about us if everything else fails'. There is a final quintet:

> We'll all have a finger, a finger, a finger,
> We'll all have a finger in the CHRISTMAS PIE.

Anthelia meanwhile has been taken to Lord Anophel's Alga Castle, on a lonely sea-shore. Her captivity has been given a certain interest through the efforts of Grovelgrub to double-cross his master, by persuading him to treat her roughly, and then being ingratiatingly sympathetic himself. Just as Lord Anophel's patience is becoming exhausted, there is another opportune arrival by Sir Oran, who puts the villains to flight. A pleasant touch is that, as Grovelgrub runs away across the sands, Lord Anophel follows, calling him to stop. But, hearing the voice of pursuit, the reverend gentleman concludes that the dumb Sir Oran has found his voice and is pursuing him. The pair therefore disappear at a constant rate of acceleration. The Reverend Mr Portpipe is 'put into requisition to make a mystical union of Anthelia and Forester', Sir Oran continues to reside with them, Fax and Portpipe are frequent visitors, Sir Telegraph marries and leaves off driving, and Miss Constantina Pinmoney has the satisfaction, 'through the skilful management of her mother, of making hte happiest of men of Lord Anophel Achthar'. In this somewhat perfunctory way Peacock winds up his novel.

The *Literary Gazette* of 2 March 1817 congratulated the author, 'by anticipation, on the success of his singular, and, we may add,

original work.' To the *Monthly Magazine* he was 'not merely a wit, but a philosopher, a patriot, and a man of taste'. Later, in the October number of the *British Review*, the book was attacked, and since, like all Peacock's subsequent novels, it appeared simply as 'By the author of *Headlong Hall*', the authorship of both was accredited to William Drummond. The book's broken back remains a puzzle. The Halliford editors suggest that it was probably planned to end after the Chess Dance, but that 'the printer might well have reported that the tale was too short for three volumes, even in duodecimo, and too long for one'.[10] But it is also possible that, if Peacock intended such an ending originally, he was dissatisfied with it, and, in view of all the changes taking place as a result of the end of war with France, decided to bide his time. If so, he was rewarded by the October number of the *Quarterly Review*.[11]

Melincourt reveals Peacock's pessimism. Sarcastic's speech at the anti-saccharine fête is supported by a long footnote from *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* by Milton:

> 'Custom being but a mere face, as Echo is a mere voice, rests not in her unaccomplishment, until by secret inclination she accorporate herself with Error, who being a blind and serpentine body, without a head, willingly accepts what he wants, and supplies what her incompleteness went seeking. . . .'

However warm and gay the company at Peacock's dinner tables, the forces of custom and necessity are at work outside. One thinks of Albert Schweitzer's simile of the Gulf Stream, miraculously flowing between two ice-cold banks of its own element.[12] That was Schweitzer's picture of the problem of living. Underneath his humour and his irony, Peacock's conception was much the same.

Chapter Ten

FAREWELL TO PARNASSUS

In March 1817, the month in which *Melincourt* appeared, Shelley and Mary took possession of the house that, probably through Peacock, had been acquired in Great Marlow. Peacock was only a few minutes away. Hogg was a frequent visitor from town, and soon this diverse trio were talking, sailing and arguing as before. 'We saw everything worth seeing', says Peacock, 'within a radius of fifteen miles'. Peacock had an excellent principle for judging the quality of an inn: he examined the state of the mustard-pot and the state of the *cabinet*. If either of these proved unsatisfactory, the party moved elsewhere.

One of the places to which Peacock loved to take his friends was Virginia Water. This is perhaps an appropriate moment to tell the story, which he recalled at the end of his life,[1] of how the public were excluded from it, and how they got their own back. The restriction was not part of the government's policy of enclosure; it was a matter of caprice on the part of the Prince Regent. Virginia Water had always been open to the public through the Wheatsheaf Inn. The Prince Regent not only had this entrance shut, but also decreed that, wherever the grounds were open to a road, fences should be erected so high that even the outside passengers of stage-coaches should be unable to look over, This was to secure privacy for himself when he was fishing. However:

> 'On an eminence outside the Royal Grounds stood a tower, known as the Clock-Case. This had been sold with the land round it, and was inhabited by a poor family, who put in a telescope on the platform of the roof. This tower and its grounds became a place of great resort for pic-nic parties, and visitors of all kinds,

who kept up a perpetual succession at the telescope, while the Royal Angler and his fair companion were fishing.'

The property reverted to the Crown. But later William the Fourth lowered the fences and re-opened the old access. Then, hearing about the tower, he put an old couple back in it, and even provided them with a telescope. The whole story has a suspiciously Peacockian ring to it, and one wonders if he himself whispered a word in the right ear.

Peacock, Shelley and Hogg are no doubt the three young men of *A Story Beginning at Chertsey*, who walked through the field of cowslips and stood on the Abbey Bridge to hear the curfew. It is a pleasant picture: the three philosopher musketeers, walking, sailing, trying out hostelries and tiring the sun with talking as they returned home in the spring and summer evenings.[2] But if we widen our lens we shall find that there are other characters in the scene. Mary Shelley, as she now was, had never forgotten that both Hogg and Peacock had been admirers of Harriet. She referred to them collectively as 'the menagerie'.[3] Nor did she get on with Peacock's mother. In the earlier days, she had referred disparagingly to 'Dame Peacock and son'. Now there were the usual petty frictions that can occur when two ladies do not see eye to eye.

'I had occasion to send to Peacock for a book, and in my billet I asked why they had not sent for the paper. The answer returned was: "Mrs Peacock's compliments, and she did not think it convenient to us to lend the paper".'

The Shelleys were joined by Claire Clairmont, with Allegra, her infant daughter by Lord Byron; and Leigh Hunt and his wife had now become frequent visitors, following his praise of Shelley's poetry in the *Examiner*, the previous December. There was evidently a coolness between Leigh Hunt and Peacock, partly because Shelley was helping them both financially. Hunt wrote in his autobiography:

'. . . as an instance of Shelley's extraordinary generosity, a friend of his, a man of letters, enjoyed from him at that period a pension of £100 per annum, though he had but a thousand of his own; and he continued to enjoy it till his fortune rendered it superfluous.'[4]

Leigh Hunt glosses over the fact that he himself was the recipient of larger sums than this from Shelley. Superficially, relations seem to have been cordial enough, but the other side of the picture is recorded by the unforgiving Mary: 'Peacock dines here every day, *uninvited*, to drink his bottle. I have not seen him; he morally disgusts me; and Marianne (Mrs Hunt) says that he is very ill-tempered.'

Another visitor was Mary's father, William Godwin, who was now quite happy to accept Shelley as his son-in-law, and who evidently regarded himself as another name on Shelley's pay-roll. In spite of these pressures, the peculiar intimacy between Shelley and Peacock was undisturbed. Once, a day after they had walked together through Bisham Woods, Shelley said to him, 'You must have thought me very unreasonable yesterday evening'. Peacock replied that he certainly did. 'Then', said Shelley, 'I will tell you what I would not say to anyone else. I was thinking of Harriet.'

In the early part of the year Shelley was involved in two legal matters. One concerned the alterations to his Will necessitated by the death of Harriet and his marriage to Mary. The bequests remained as before, including the £12,000 to Claire Clairmont, about which Mary Shelley was to complain when probate was granted on the death of Sir Timothy in 1844. In the other suit, Shelley claimed the custody of Harriet's two children—the younger one had been born the previous September. The case was heard in Chancery by Lord Eldon, who found against Shelley and blandly added that any publication of the details of his judgement would be treated as contempt of court. It was therefore commonly assumed that Shelley had joined the ranks of Horne Tooke, Leigh Hunt, and all those who had been punished for stating unpopular opinions; but in the *Memoirs*, Peacock, emphasizes that it was given, not because of Shelley's opinions, but because of his conduct. He quotes Lord Eldon as saying:

> 'Mr Shelley published and maintained long ago the doctrine that marriage is a contract binding only under mutual pleasure. He has carried out that doctrine in his own practice; he has done nothing to show he does not still maintain it; and I consider such practice injurious to the best interests of society.'

Shelley threw himself into a new poem. He found a high secluded spot in Bisham Woods, and there he spent the summer days writing *Laon and Cythna*, an impassioned utterance on the ideals and realities of the French Revolution. When it was finished, Ollier refused to publish it. Bor a long time Shelley would not compromise, but at length the poem was extensively altered and appeared, in the following March, as *The Revolt of Islam*. Meanwhile, three copies of the original poem had leaked through the printers and one had found its way to the *Quarterly Review*, which attacked it with all guns firing.

Peacock, too, was busy with poetry. In the autumn of 1817 a minor piece appeared called *The Round Table or King Arthur's Feast*, published by John Arliss in the Juvenile Library.[5] As in *Calidore*, King Arthur is in exile:

> King Arthur sat down by the lovely sea-coast,
> As thin as a lath, and as pale as a ghost,
> He looked on the east, and the west, and the south,
> With a tear in his eye and a pipe in his mouth,
> And he said to old Merlin, who near him did stand,
> Drawing circles, triangles, and squares in the sand,
> 'Sure nothing more dismal and tedious can be,
> Than to sit always smoking and watching the sea.'

Merlin offers to entertain him by bringing to his table all the kings and queens since Arthur's defeat at the battle of Camlan. This he does, and a history lesson in verse results.[6]

But during that summer Peacock was busy with a more serious poem, *Rhododaphne, or the Thessalian Spell*, a tale of ancient Greece and ancient magic. The atmosphere is set by the quotation from Apuleius at the beginning of the prose preface:

> 'Considering that I was now in the middle of Thessaly, celebrated by the accordant voice of the world as the birthplace of the magic art, I examined all things with intense curiosity. . . . I expected the statues and images to walk, the walls to speak; I anticipated prophetic voices from the cattle, and oracles from the morning sky.'

The poem tells the story of Anthemion, a young man of Arcadia, who goes to the Temple of Love at Thespis to make an offering

to the deity by which he hopes to find a cure for his stricken sweetheart, Calliroë. Rhododaphne, a beautiful witch, enchants him. Her name, Daphne of the Rose, means oleander, something lovely but poisonous. She kisses him and warns him that his kiss must bring death to another woman. He returns to his sweetheart, Calliroë, and she dies. Anthemion wanders disconsolate, till he is captured by pirates, who also capture Rhododaphne. Her magic causes shipwreck, and she and Anthemion are washed ashore on a deserted coast. Anthemion runs away, but by her magic he is drawn back to her and finds that the derelict cottage in which he left her has been transformed into a lavish palace. She claims him as hers, and he surrenders. But then his thoughts turn back to his dead Calliroë. Urania, the spirit of true love, kills Rhododaphne, and when she dies, Calliroë revives, having been not dead but (like the Princess in *Fiolfar*) bewitched by a magic spell which is now broken. She exercises her discretion in the matter of Anthemion's infidelity.

Rhododaphne is Peacock's last and best long poem. It is full of ideas which move him, such as the power of ancient religions and of ancient music. When Anthemion finds Rhododaphne aboard the pirate ship:

> She rose, and loosed her radiant hair,
> And raised the golden lyre in air;
> The lyre, beneath the breeze's wings,
> As if a spirit swept the strings
> Breathed airy music, sweet and strange,
> In many a wild phantastic change.[7]

This is a note we have heard before; but when Rhododaphe entices Anthemion into her palace on the island there is an unfamiliar sensuality which approaches that of Keats:

> His eyes swim
> With dizziness. The lamps grow dim
> And tremble and expire. No more.
> Darkness is there, and Mystery;
> And Silence keeps the golden key
> Of Beauty's bridal door.[8]

Rhododaphne, it has been said, is not a great poem, but it is poetry. There are dull passages, but every now and again the verse takes wing:

> . . . Till full from Athos' distant height
> The sun poured out his golden beams,
> Scattering the mists like morning dreams,
> And rocks and lakes and isles and streams
> Burst, like creation, into light.

One of the dominant themes is that the old gods and nymphs had been driven away by the machinery and the materialism of his own times:

> In ocean's caves no Nereid dwells,
> No Oread walks the mountain dells;
> The stream no sedge-crowned Genii roll
> From bounteous urn: great Pan is dead.
> The life, the intellectual soul
> Of vale, the grove, and stream, has fled
> For ever with the creed sublime
> That nursed the Muse of earlier time.[9]

Shelley predicted 'extraordinary success' for the poem in a review, unpublished at the time, which was found among Leigh Hunt's papers and became known in 1879:

> 'There is a strong *religio loci* throughout which almost impels us to believe that the author wrote from the dictation of a voice heard from some Pythian cavern in the solitudes where Delphi stood. . . . This it is to be a scholar; this it is to have read Homer and Sophocles and Plato.'[10]

Rhododaphne was published, anonymously, in February 1818, at the same time as *The Revolt of Islam*. The *Monthly Review* for 19 February did not identify the author, but carried four and a half pages of full quotation: 'a very elegant little volume', it concluded, and credited the writer with 'an extensive knowledge of ancient erotica'. The *Literary Gazatte* for 21 February traced it to 'the pen of Mr Peacock' and praised it in comparison with 'our Scotts,

Southeys, Byrons, Moores, Campbells, and Wordsworths'. Poe found it 'brimful of music'; Medwin, who later wrote a life of Shelley, was also full of praise, even if he chose to refer to it as 'Rhododendron'. In America, it was pirated by Matthew Carey at Philadelphia and ascribed to the Virginian poet, Richard Dabney. It was also attributed to Byron, who declined to acknowledge it but admitted that he would have gladly 'fathered the "Grecian enchantress"'.

Peacock proposed to follow *Rhododaphne* with a 'Nympholeptic Tale'. This reached the stage of a prose summary:

> 'The Prince, a joyous and festive youth, a leader of Bacchic rites . . . suddenly becomes dispirited and melancholy. A nymph has built an altar to Diana in a solitary grove, and breathed on it a vow of chastity beneath the midnight moon. The Prince has seen her and been repulsed. He is seized with nympholeptic madness.'[11]

Shelley enquired about this poem in August 1818, when he had left England for Italy: 'Pray are you yet cured of your Nympholepsy? This is a sweet disease, but one as obstinate and dangerous as any—even when the Nymph is a Poliad. . . .'

By 'Poliad' Shelley meant a city nymph, a nymph of the metropolis, a reference to which it would be interesting to have the key. But Peacock never finished his 'Nympholeptic Tale'. He explained this in later life by saying that he discovered that his friend, Horace Smith, was writing a poem on the same subject. But this did not appear until 1821. More probably the self-critical Peacock had come to compare his own work with Shelley's; and to ponder the passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* where Socrates speaks of:

> 'a divine madness which proceeds from the Muses, taking possession of a tender and unoccupied soul, awakening and bacchically inspiring it towards songs and other poetry. . . . But he who, without this Madness from the Muses approaches the poetical gate having persuaded himself that by art alone he may become sufficiently a poet, will find in the end his own imperfection, and see the poetry of his cold prudence vanish into nothingness before the light of that which has sprung from divine insanity.'

Peacock stopped being a poet. It was then, as J. B. Priestley says,

that he really started to write poetry. Or, as Carl Dawson puts it, 'only when he stopped courting the Muse did she at last acknowledge his long service'. As the poet retired into the weather-hut, out, on the other side, came the critic. In the *Essay on Fashionable Literature*, unfinished, and unpublished till the present century, he argues that the soul of literary, as of sartorial fashion, is novelty: 'The books and dress of the season go out of date together'. The fashion in each is dictated by authority—in the case of books, by the reviews, which themselves 'form a very prominent feature in this transitory literature'. This leads to an attack on the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* as 'the organs and oracles of the two great political factions, the Whigs and the Tories':

> '. . . their extensive circulation is less ascribed to any marked superiority either of knowledge or talent, which they possess over their minor competitors, than to the curiosity of the public in general to learn or divine from these semi-official oracles what the said two factions are meditating.'

The essay then goes on to a detailed refutation of the *Edinburgh Review's* hostile notice of Coleridge's *Christabel.* It is chiefly interesting in comparison with his second critical essay, *The Four Ages of Poetry*, written two years later, by which time he had taken up a very different and much more radical position.

In the autumn of 1817 life at Great Marlow went on as usual. As a variation from the countryside, he and Shelley would sometimes walk the thirty-odd miles to London and spend a couple of nights there. During these visits Peacock took Shelley to the theatre. A visit to *The School for Scandal* was not a success: Peacock 'had great difficulty to make him stay to the end'. The Italian opera was another matter. During the 1817 season, Peacock persuaded him to go to *Don Giovanni*, and until he finally left England, Shelley was a frequent opera-goer. He delighted in the music of Mozart, and specially in the *Nozze di Figaro*, which was performed several times in the early part of 1818. One of the things he appreciated was the 'quiet and decorous' behaviour of the audiences: 'it is delightful', he said, 'to see human beings so civilized'.

Such decorum does not seem to have extended to the Shelleys'

private circle. Robert Buchanan says that, on one occasion at least, Peacock refused to enter the house while Mary was in it, and was 'only constrained to do so by an entreaty from Mary herself'. The claims on Shelley's purse from those around him had not lessened. Mary Mitford, retailing local gossip, speaks of Leigh Hunt removing 'a cartload of furniture' from the house to raise money, and of William Godwin threatening to stab himself if he were not given a loan. However exaggerated these accounts may be, Shelley felt it was time to move again. In March 1818 he left England, never to return. By then, he had two children, William and Clara, by his second wife, and it has been suggested that he may have feared losing them, as he had lost Harriet's children. But Peacock does not encourage such speculation. 'Restlessness and embarrassment', he says, 'were the causes of his determination; and, according to the Newtonian doctrine, it is needless to look for more causes than are necessary to explain the phenomenon'.

The Shelleys and Claire had moved to London on 10 February, and Peacock went with them. The next day, at the Leigh Hunts', he met Keats.[12] Then on Tuesday 10 March, as he records in the *Memoirs*, he saw Shelley for the last time:

> 'The evening was a remarkable one, as being that of the first performance of Rossini in England, and of the first appearance here of Malibran's father, Garcini. He played Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Seviglia.*'

After the opera, he supped with Shelley and his travelling companions; then they went back to his lodgings, and Shelley, who had been sleeping badly, fell into a dead slumber. The guests crept quietly away without disturbing him. Early the next morning he was gone.

Ten days later, Peacock described himself in a letter to Hogg as 'lonely as a cloud', and 'melancholy as a gib cat'. He had filled his shelves with Shelley's books and had thoughts of passing the time between Easter and Christmas in 'writing a novel of which the scene will be in London', and 'another Pagan poem'.[13] But very soon there was a change of plan. In June he wrote to Shelley:

'I intend to make a stand against the "encroachments" of "black bile" in modern literature. The fifth canto of *Childe Harold* is really too bad. I cannot consent to the *auditor tantum* of this "systematic poisoning" of the mind of the "reading public".'

These few sentences, with their copious and reassuring inverted commas, gave all the news that Peacock thought it necessary, at this stage, to convey to his friend Shelley concerning his new satirical novel, *Nightmare Abbey*.[14]

Chapter Eleven

NIGHTMARE ABBEY

Two months earlier Peacock had declared his intentions to Hogg in similarly general terms:

> 'At present I am writing a comic romance with a title of 'Nightmare Abbey', and amusing myself with the darkness and misanthropy of modern literature, from the lantern jaws of which I shall endeavour to elicit a laugh.'

Writing from Italy on 5 July, Shelley suggested as a motto for the book a line from Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*. 'Have you a stool there, to be melancholy upon?' Peacock incorporated this, and further lines from the passage, adding them to a motto he had taken from Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, beginning:

> There's a dark lantern of the spirit,
> Which none see by but those who bear it. . . .

But if Shelley expected more information in return for his interest, he was disappointed. A letter from Peacock in August casually mentioned that *Nightmare Abbey* was finished, and then went on to other topics such as the weather and paper money. Shelley became impatient:

> '*Nightmare Abbey* is finished. What is it? What is it? You keep it as secret as if the priest of Ceres had dictated its sacred pages.'

Peacock blandly replied:

> 'I thought I had fully explained to you the object of *Nightmare Abbey*, which was to bring into philosophical focus a few of the morbidities of modern literature, and to let in a little daylight on its atrabilious complexion.'

In writing this Peacock was being a little disingenuous. What he omitted to mention was that Scythrop Glowry, the central character, was unmistakeably a satirical version of Shelley himself.

Nightmare Abbey, the Glowrys' family-mansion, was 'pleasantly situated on a strip of dry land between the sea and the fens, at the verge of the county of Lincoln'. Like Melincourt Castle, it was in 'a highly picturesque state of semi-dilapidation', but unlike the Melincourts, the Glowrys had not transcended their environment. Scythrop's father, Christopher Glowry, Esquire, was 'naturally of an atrabilious temperament, and much troubled with those phantoms of indigestion which are commonly called *blue devils*'.[1] His gloom had not been relieved by his marriage. We are given a fearsome glimpse of the lady to whom 'he had offered his hand from pique', and who had 'accepted it from interest':

> 'She often went her daily rounds through a series of deserted apartments, every creature in the house vanishing at the creak of her shoe, much more at the sound of her voice, to which the nature of things affords no parallel. . . . Mr Glowry used to say that his house was no better than a spacious kennel, for every one in it led the life of a dog. . . . But one morning, like Sir Leoline in *Christabel*, "he woke and found his lady dead", and remained a very consolate widower, with one small child.'

Young Scythrop was sent to public school, 'where a little learning was painfully beaten into him', and from thence to a university, where it was 'carefully taken out of him'. He had passed some of his vacations in London at the house of his uncle, Mr Hilary, 'a very cheerful and elastic gentleman', who had married Mr Glowry's sister; and there he had met, and lost, a Miss Emily Girouette.[2] Discussing the matter with his father, who, 'to comfort him, read him a Commentary on Ecclesiastes', Scythrop observed:

> 'The fault is in their artificial education, which studiously models them into mere musical dolls, to be set out for sale in the great toyshop of society.
>
> "To be sure", said Mr Glowry, "their education is not so well

finished as yours has been; and your idea of a musical doll is good· I bought one myself, but it was confoundedly out of tune. . .".'

Disappointed in love, Scythrop returned to his books, and became a recluse in the south-eastern tower of the Abbey. Of the other towers, the south-western was 'ruinous and full of owls', the north-western 'contained the apartments of Mr Glowry', and the north-eastern was 'appropriated to the domestics'. These fitted excellently into the scene, since Mr Glowry always chose them for a long face, or a dismal name, or both. The butler was Raven,[3] the Steward was Crow, the grooms were Mattocks and Graves. On one unfortunate occasion Glowry had engaged as a footman a person named Diggory Deathshead, who had turned out to have a round, ruddy face, and laughing eyes. Before his dismissal, he had made enough conquests among the maids to leave 'a flourishing colony of young Deathsheads to join chorus with the owls'. An occasional visitor to the Abbey was 'a very lachrymose and morbid gentleman', Mr Flosky, who commended himself to Glowry by his 'very fine sense of the grim and tearful'.[4] Another visitor was Mr Toobad, the 'Manichaean Millenarian', given to quoting perpetually the twelfth chapter of Revelations: 'the devil is come among you, having great wrath'. The neighbouring cleric, the Reverend Mr Larynx, fits neatly into Martin Freeman's scale of improvement in Peacock's clerics: '. . . a good-natured, accommodating divine, who was always most obligingly ready to take a dinner and a bed at the house of any country gentleman in distress for a companion'.

Soon after the 'disastrous termination' of his passion for Emily Girouette, Scythrop found himself alone at Nightmare Abbey, his father having gone off to attend to a lawsuit in London. He paced the terraces in a great 'cogibundity of cogitation', and, as Shelley had done under the influence of William Godwin, 'became troubled with the *passion for reforming the world.*' This led to his publishing a treatise, 'wrapped in the monk's hood of transcendental philosophy', but 'filled with hints of matters deep and dangerous, which he thought would set the whole nation in a ferment':

'. . . Some months afterwards he received a letter from his book-

seller, informing that only seven copies had been sold, and concluding with a polite request for the balance.

Scythrop did not despair. "Seven copies", he thought, "have been sold. Seven is a mystical number, and the omen is good. Let me find the seven purchasers of my seven copies, and they shall be the seven golden candle-sticks with which I will illuminate the world".'

This fine resolve had unexpected results later. So did Scythrop's decision to have constructed, with the aid of a dumb carpenter, a secret panel, and hide-out, 'such as would have baffled the skill of the Parisian police'. Scythrop did this because he 'foresaw that a great leader of human regeneration would be involved in fearful dilemmas, and determined, for the benefit of mankind in general, to adopt all possible precautions for the preservation of himself'. This done, he 'drank Madeira, and laid deep schemes for a through repair of the crazy fabric of human nature'.

But then his father, having lost his lawsuit, arrived at Nightmare Abbey with several guests. One was 'Scythrop's friend and fellow-collegian, the Honourable Mr Listless'.[5] Others were the 'cheerful and elastic Mr Hilary', Mrs Hilary, and their orphan niece, Miss Marionetta Celestina O'Carroll, daughter of Mr Glowry's younger sister, who had made a runaway love-match with an Irish officer. This was 'a very blooming and accomplished young lady':

> 'Being a compound of the *Allegro Vivace* of the O'Carrolls, and of the *Andante Doloroso* of the Glowries, she exhibited in her own character all the diversities of an April sky. . . . She had some coquetry, and more caprice, liking and disliking almost at the same moment; pursuing an object while it seemed unattainable, and rejecting it when in her power as not worth the trouble of possession. . . .'

Scythrop, an easy conquest, invited the lady to his room, and suggested (through his reading of *Horrid Mysteries*)[6] that they mix their blood in a bowl and drink it as a sacrament. Marionetta ran for it, Scythrop, following, came into violent contact with Toobad on a landing, and the two plunged together to the foot of the

stairs, 'like two billiard-balls into one pocket'. In a subsequent interview, Glowry observed that Marionetta had no fortune, and that he himself had pledged Scythrop's hand to another lady. But hearing that Marionetta was to be taken away from the Abbey, Scythrop threatened to drink from a skull (his ancestor's) which, he averred, was filled with a deadly poison. Glowry relented; Scythrop returned to Marionetta, with the skull, which actually contained Madeira, and which he 'drank by the way'.

The next two chapters (five and six) are vintage Peacock in their blend of comedy, irony and music. Marionetta constantly makes Scythrop jealous of Listless, and, when he begins to storm, sings '*Zitti, zitti, piano, piano, Non facciamo confusione*—' from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, or 'some other similar facezia'.[7] Listless summons his French valet, Fatout, whenever the least exertion is demanded of his memory ('Fatout, when did I think of going to Cheltenham, and did not go?'). Then, one morning, a parcel of books arrives. When Fatout has opened it, Flosky picks up one of the books and examines it:

MR FLOSKY: (turning over the leaves) 'Devilman, a novel. Hm. Hatred, revenge, misanthropy, and quotations from the Bible. Hm. This is the morbid anatomy of black bile.'

This is an allusion to William Godwin's *Mandeville*, which Shelley had read at Marlow and much admired. It was bold of Peacock to satirize it, when Hazlitt and other leading critics of the day were enthusiastically praising Godwin's writings. Nor can it have commended him to Mary Shelley. Flosky is in particularly good form on this occasion: 'Modern literature is a north-east wind—a blight of the human soul. I take credit to myself for having helped to make it so.'

The chapter ends with the entry of Toobad covered with mud. He had been bound for London to meet his daughter Celinda, recently returned from Germany (the wife chosen by himself and Glowry for Scythrop) when a shy horse took fright at a windmill and overturned his 'travelling chariot' into a ditch. Toobad had walked back to Nightmare Abbey, repeating all the way his favourite quotation from Revelations.

The next scene is set in the library, in the evening. Marionetta is at the harp. Listless has stirred himself to turn her pages, relieved occasionally in this delightful labour by Larynx. Scythrop, furiously jealous, sits reading Dante's *Purgatorio*. Marionetta observes to Listless:

> MARIONETTA: 'Shall I teach you a compendious method of courtship, that will give you no trouble whatever?'
> THE HONOURABLE MR LISTLESS: 'You will confer on me an inexpressible obligation. I am all impatience to hear it.'
> MARIONETTA: 'Sit with you back to the lady and read Dante; only be sure to begin in the middle, and turn over three or four pages at once—backwards as well as forwards, and she will immediately perceive that you are desperately in love with her—desperately.'

Flosky joins the conversation and observes that 'tea, late dinners, and the French Revolution' have 'played the devil', and 'brought the devil into play'. Listless says that he cannot see the connection of ideas. Flosky replies that he would be sorry if he could, and launches into a fine cadenza on Kantian reasoning:

> '. . . The beauty of this process is, that at every step it strikes out into two branches, in a compound ratio of ramification; so that you are perfectly sure of losing your way, and keeping your mind in perfect health, by the perpetual exercise of an interminable quest; and for these reasons I have christened my eldest son Emanuel Kant Flosky.'[8]

Peacock now adds to his gallery of eccentrics with the arrival of Mr Asterias, the ichthyologist, who, having heard that a mermaid had been sighted off the Lincolnshire coast, has come with his son Aquarius in search of it.

> '. . . One night, shortly after his arrival, he was sitting in one of the windows of the library, looking towards the sea, when his attention was attracted by a figure which was moving near the edge of the surf, and which was dimly visible through the moonless summer night. Its motions were irregular, like those of a person in a state of indecision. It has extremely long hair, which

floated in the wind. . . . Mr Asterias stole out of the library on tip-toe, with his finger on his lips, having beckoned Aquarius to follow him.'

He found nothing, but on his return the conversation naturally turned to these 'oran-outangs o the sea', and led to an unfortunate lapse on the part of the impeccable Fatout.

THE HON. MR LISTLESS: . . . 'Fatout, did I ever see a mermaid?'

FATOUT: 'Mermaid! mer-r-m-m-aid! Ah! merry maid! Oui, monsieur! Yes, sir, very many. I vish dere was one or two in de kitchen—ma foi! Dey be all as melancholic as so many tombstone.'

THE HON. MR LISTLESS. 'I mean, Fatout, an odd kind of human fish.'

FATOUT. 'De odd fish! Ah, oui! I understand de phrase: ve have seen nothing else since ve left town—ma foi!'

THE HON. MR LISTLESS. 'You seem to have a cup too much, sir.'

FATOUT. 'Non, monsieur, de cup too little, De fen be very unwholesome, and I drink-a-de ponch vid Raven de butler, to keep out de bad air.'

There is a preliminary sketch, here, for Seithenyn on *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. This scene also has two occasions when we seem to hear Peacock talking through his characters. Once, surprisingly, through Asterias, when he extols the life of the scientist:

'. . . Nature is his great and inexhaustible treasure. His days are always too short for his enjoyment: *ennui* is a stranger to his door. At peace with the world and with his own mind, he suffices to himself, makes all around him happy, and the close of his pleasing and beneficial existence is the evening of a beautiful day.'

The other time we seem to hear the voice of Peacock is, more predictably, in the views expressed by Hilary:

'It is one mode of pleasure to listen to the music of "Don Giovanni", in a theatre glittering with light, and crowded with elegance and beauty; it is another to glide at sunset over the bosom of a lonely lake, where no sound disturbs the silence but the motion of the boat through the waters. A happy disposition

derives pleasure from both, a discontented temper from neither.... The one gathers all the flowers, the other all the nettles, in his path. The one has the faculty of enjoying every thing, the other of enjoying nothing.'

The next chapter consists of a hilarious interview between Marionetta and Flosky. All Marionetta wants to know is, what is wrong with Scythrop. After several minutes, she sees that either he has no information, or is determined not to impart it. Flosky apologizes, but explains: 'If any person living could make report of having obtained any information on any subject from Ferdinando Flosky, my transcendental reputation would be ruined for ever'.

We now learn the reason for Scythrop's *malaise*. Returning to his room late in the evening when Asterias thought he had seen a mermaid on the sea-shore, he had found his study 'pre-occupied'. A stranger, muffled in a cloak, was sitting at his table; and when the cloak was allowed to fall, it revealed: '. . . a female form and countenance of dazzling grace and beauty, with long flowing hair of raven blackness, and large black eyes of almost oppressive brilliancy, which strikingly contrasted with a complexion of snowy whiteness'.

Peacock takes care here to make the lady physically unlike Mary Godwin, who was fair and blue-eyed. Nevertheless, the strange lady is soon quoting from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft. She explains that she has come across a copy of Scythrop's treatise, 'Philosophical Gas; or a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind'. This, thinks Scythrop, is one of my seven golden candlesticks. He ventures to ask her name. 'Call me Stella'[10] says the lady, and announces that she is seeking refuge from an atrocious persecution. Scythrop installs her in the secret room, connected by a sliding panel with his own. Peacock then analyses his consequent dilemma:

> 'He could not dissemble to himself that he was in love, at the same time, with two damsels of minds and habits as remote as the antipodes. . . . With Stella, he could indulge freely in all his romantic and philosophical visions. He could build castles in the

air, and she would pile towers and turrets on the imaginary edifices. With Marionetta it was otherwise: she knew nothing of the world and society beyond the sphere of her own experience. Her life was all music and sunshine, and she wondered what any one could see to complain of in such a pleasant state of things.'

Now comes the famous farewell dinner-party to Lord Byron, who, characterized as Mr Cypress, is on the point of leaving England. Much of his dinner-table conversation is based closely on *Childe Harold*, as Peacock indicates in his notes:

MR CYPRESS. 'There is no worth nor beauty but in the mind's idea. Love sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind.[11] Confusion, thrice confounded, is the portion of him who rests even for an instant on that most brittle of reeds—the affection of a human being. The sum of our social destiny is to inflict or endure.'

Finally, Cypress sings a song, which is one of the great parodies in the English language:

There is a fever of the spirit,
  The brand of Cain's unresting doom,
Which in the lone dark souls that bear it
  Glows like the lamp in Tullia's tomb:
Unlike that lamp, its subtle fire,
  Burns, blasts, consumes its cell, the heart,
Till, one by one, joy, hope, desire,
  Like creams of shadowy smoke depart.

'Let us all be unhappy together', says Glowry.[13] But Hilary and Larynx disagree, and erstore the balance with the song that, well known as it is deserves to be given in full:

Seamen three? What men be ye?
Gotham's three wise men we be.
Whither in your bowl so free?
To rake the moon from out the sea.
The bowl goes trim. The moon doth shine.
And our ballast is old wine;
And your ballast is old wine.

Who art thou, so fast adrift?
I am he they call Old Care.
Here on board we will thee lift.
No: I may not enter there.
Wherefore so? 'Tis Jove's decree,
In a bowl Care may not be;
In a bowl Care may not be.

Fear ye not the waves that roll?
No; in charmed bowl we swim.
What the charm that floats the bowl?
Water may not pass the brim.
The bowl goes trim. The moon doth shine.
And our ballast is old wine;
And you ballast is old wine.

Peacock concludes his chapter: 'Mr Cypress, having his ballast on board, stepped, the same evening, into his bowl, or travelling chariot, and departed to rake seas and rivers, lakes and canals, for the moon of ideal beauty'.

After the brilliant Byronic episode, Peacock turns to the resolution of his plot. Fatout informs his master that Mrs Hilary's gentlewoman, for whom he has 'conceived a *tendresse*', has seen a ghostly figure stalking along the galleries, wrapped in a white shroud, with a bloody turban on its head. Listless retails this in the library after dinner, and a number of ghost stories follow. Flosky interrupts by observing that he sees a ghost at this moment, and the company, following the direction of his gaze, see the turbaned figure coming in through the opened door. In the resultant débâcle, Toobad jumps out of the window and is fished out of the moat, quoting Revelations, by Asterias, who is disappointed to find he has not caught a mermaid.

Glowry then hears voices and movements of furniture from Scythrop's room, and demands entrance and an explanation. Scythrop tells him he is composing a play on the Great Mogul in exile, and imitating the voices, as he writes, and explains away any other sounds, in abstuse terms, as peculiar accoustical pheno-

mena. But the mention of Marionetta brings Stella, furious, out of her hiding-place. It is then revealed that Stella is in fact Celinda Toobad, and that Scythrop, her protector, is also the chosen husband-to-be that she is avoiding. Everyone is 'attracted by the tumult to the scene of action'. 'Multitudinous questions, and answers *en masse*, composed a *charivari*, to which the genius of Rossini alone could have given a suitable accompaniment.' Eventually the guests move off, leaving Scythrop in a stylized and minutely described attitude of gloom until Raven comes to announce that dinner is ready. He suggests a boiled fowl and a glass of Madeira, as being 'prescribed by the faculty in cases of low spirits'. But when he learns that both Marionetta and Stella-Celinda have left, Scythrop refuses to come down.

'Shall I bring your dinner here?'

'Yes.'

'What will you have?'

'A pint of port and a pistol.'

'A pistol!'

'And a pint of port. I will make my exist like Werter. Go. Stay. Did Miss O'Carroll say any thing?'

'No.'

'Did Miss Toobad say any thing?'

'The strange lady? No.'

'Did either of them cry?'

'No.'

'What did they do?'

'Nothing.'

'What did Mr Toobad say?'

'He said, fifty times over, the devil was come among us.'

'And they are gone?'

'Yes; and the dinner is getting cold. There is a time for every thing under the sun. You may as well dine first, and be miserable afterwards.'

'True, Raven. There is something in that. I will take you advice: therefore, bring me—'

'The port and the pistol?'
'No; the boiled fowl and Madeira.'

When he has dined, Glowry appears and says he will be obliged for 'a small glimmering of information' as to what is going on.

'. . . What would you have?'
'I would have my love.'
'And pray, sir, who is you love?'
'Celinda—Marionetta—either—both.'
'Both! That may do very well in a German tragedy; and the Great Mogul might have found it very feasible in his lodgings at Kensington; but it will not do in Lincolnshire.'

Scythrop is adamant: he must shoot himself. Glowry persuades him to stay his self-execution for one week, while he goes to see whether he can prevail on either of the ladies. The results of his search, and the characteristic way in which, at the last moment, Peacock tilts the impending tragedy over into absurdity, are matters which I will leave for those who do not know the novel to enjoy reading for themselves. Suffice it to say that Scythrop rails 'in good set terms against the fickleness of women', and lives to moan another day, and to drink more Madeira.

'I have been laughing at Nightmare Abbey', wrote Mary Mitford on 3 February 1819, 'the pleasantest of all Mr Peacock's works, whether in verse or prose, *Rhododaphne* and *Melincourt* included. I have not met with a more amiable or cheerful piece of raillerie.' Another who enjoyed it was Shelley himself:

'I am delighted with Nightmare Abbey. I think Scythrop a character admirably conceived and executed, and I know not how to praise sufficiently the lightness, chastity, and strength of the language as a whole. It perhaps exceeds all your works in this. The catastrophe is excellent. . . .'

Shelley even gave the name 'Scythrop's tower' to his rooftop study at the Villa Valsovano where he wrote *The Cenci*. Similarly Byron sent Peacock a rosebud, with a message that he bore him

no ill will. Peacock had it mounted in an oval gold locket with an inscription on the back: 'From Byron to T. L. Peacock, 1819'.

Shelley's devotees have not always regarded the matter so amiably. Some people, who would accept the satire otherwise, feel that Peacock went too far in view of Harriet's suicide. One's attitude must depend on how far one feels Peacock was copying Shelley, Harriet and Mary Godwin from life. It is perhaps worth observing that Shelley's predicament was by no means unique. It was the stock-in-trade of the type of novel Peacock was satirizing. In Shelley's two early novels, *Zastrozzi* and *St Irvyne*, a man is torn between two women; so is the hero of Goethe's *Stella*, who ends up by shooting himself. Peacock's intention, and his achievement, was to do more than merely caricature his friend. He may even have felt that the application of comedy might be therapeutic. But if Shelley was the springboard, Scythrop goes on to acquire an identity his own. As Carl Dawson says, this is no mere *roman à clef*. 'The *Abbey* would live if the poets or ideas it depicts were forgotten—as in part they already are—because it has gained an independence from mere portrait painting and because its humour rests on more than mere burlesque'.[14]

Shelley pointed to the 'lightness, chastity and strength' of the language. It is significant that there are so many references to music, and especially to Italian opera. Peacock's prose has begun to acquire some of the quality of the music which he so much admired. The writing often has the suggestion of a libretto, and it is not surprising that this novel has been adapted and successfully presented on the stage.

I am indebted to my friend, the actor Gerald Cross, for his memories of the production of *Nightmare Abbey* which John Fernald directed at the Westminster Theatre, London, in 1952. Mr Cross, who played the part of Raven, writes:

'To begin with, Tony Sharp's adaptation, which we all approached with trepidation because of the literary discursiveness of the first act, proved us wrong in our lack of faith; the minute the curtain rose the audience was with us heart and soul, and remained there too. Of course the eye assisted the ear; Paul Mayo's sets were

inspired no less—sombrely Gothic with their crooked cobwebs and long-defunct time-pieces, and at the same time joyous with wit and affectionate irony.'

There is also a one-act play by Hubert Nicholson, based on the last chapters, and called *Pistols for Two*. Perhaps one day someone will write the operetta which at moments the original novel so nearly approaches. Peacock, it may be assumed, would have had no objection.[15] In 1822, Hookham tried to stop J. R. Planche making a musical version of *Maid Marian*, but Peacock over-ruled him.

When *Nightmare Abbey* first appeared, the Scythrop–Shelley arguments distracted attention from the book's qualities. Many people would agree with David Garnett's opinion that it is the best of Peacock's novels. It is also probably the best known. It was published in Philadelphia in the following year, and since then it has appeared in a number of languages, under an impressive array of titles such as *L'Abbaye de Cauchemar*, *Die Nachtmar-Abtei*, *A abadio do pesadola*, and *Naitmerskoe Abbatstvo*.

The next novel, *Maid Marian*, was started almost immediately afterwards; but, as we shall see in the next chapter, great changes now took place in Peacock's life, and the book did not appear for another four years.

Chapter Twelve

A MAN OF SURPRISES

Once he had become used to the idea of being without the companionship of Shelley, Peacock set out to enjoy the glorious summer weather of 1818. He boated on the Thames, he read the classics, and he corresponded with Marianne de St Croix He began to keep a diary, which at first is nothing more than a log of his inactivities.

> Monday July 20th. Went in the boat to Robin's Island, with some cold lamb and ale and the Dionysaca.
>
> Wednesday July 22nd. Anchored among the islands, and finished the eleventh book of the Dionysaca.

But then:

> Tuesday August 4th. Looked over various old books fishing for a scheme for a romance.
>
> Thursday August 6th. Could not read or write for scheming my romance. Rivers castles forests abbies monks maids kings and banditti dancing before me like a masked ball.

What he had discovered was a book published in 1795, Joseph Ritson's *Robin Hood, a Collection of all ancient Poems, Songs and Ballads now extant relative to that celebrated Outlaw.* The subject attracted him for a number of reasons. For one thing, he could re-create in Sherwood Forest the delights of the English countryside which he was daily experiencing. But also, Ritson, who had edited the book of ballads, was, as David Garnett puts it, an oddly Peacockian Character. 'His preface contains a thumping advocacy of Robin Hood's practice of robbing the rich in order to give to

the poor (and living comfortably on the marginal difference).'[1] Peacock saw that he could make his romance 'the vehicle of much oblique satire on all the oppressions that are done under the sun'.[2]

There was a further attraction: not long before, Peacock had come across a Robin Hood of his own. The Act of Parliament enclosing Windsor Forest had been incompetently drafted, and 'it was held by Counsel learned in the law . . . that, after the specified day, it was lawful to kill deer in any portion of the old forest, not enclosed with pales, whether such portion had, or had not, been vested in the Crown'. Peacock tells the story in *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*:

> 'Armed with this opinion, a farmer of Water Oakley, whose real I have forgotten in his assumed name, calling himself Robin Hood, and taking with him two of his men, whom he called Scarlet and Little John, sallied forth daily into the forest to kill the king's deer, and returned home every evening, loaded with spoil.
>
> 'Lord Harcourt, who was then Deputy Ranger of the Forest, and discharged all the duties of superintendence (for the Ranger, who was a Royal Highness, of course did nothing), went forth also, as the representative of Majesty, to put down these audacious trespassers. In my forest-rambles, I was a witness to some of their altercations: Lord Harcourt threatening to ruin Robin Hood by process in the Court of Exchequer; Robin Hood setting him at defiance, flourishing the Act of Parliament, and saying: 'My Lord, if you don't know how to make Acts of Parliament, I'll teach you.'

So matters remained, until the Government had the deer driven out by three squadrons of cavalry. Peacock watched from the vantage point of a tree, and his description of the sight, written shortly before his death, finds its place in the last chapter of this book. In the autumn of 1818, fired by Ritson's collection, he started at once on his Romance and, writing on a great wave of enthusiasm, had completed it, all but three chapters, before the end of the year. But then this, too, was interrupted. Suddenly, we

find that Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest have given way to the strange subject of 'Ryotwar and Zemindairy settlements'.

These were not abstractions from the mind of Mr J. F. Newton. They were highly practical matters, being alternate methods for the taxation of Indian villages. The directors of the East India Company had decided to reorganize their Examiners' Department. The business of the Examiner's Office had increased during the last ten years, while, as a Committee of Correspondence Report charmingly puts it, 'the Instruments for performing it', had 'decreased in number'.[3] They had decided to take the opportunity to bring in some good brains from outside, and Peacock had been persuaded to become a candidate for one of the new posts. It was not, he declared, of his own volition.[4] There is a story that he had found himself financially embarrassed through backing a bill, or in some other way standing security for his old friend, Peter Auber, now Deputy Secretary of the company. Auber may well have informed Peacock about the vacancy, and the directors about Peacock. Peacock's essay on 'Ryotwar and Zemindiary Settlements' was a digest of material supplied to him by East India House, which he prepared as part of some kind of entrance examination.

What made Peacock do this? Howard Mills suggests that with Shelley in Italy and Hogg on circuit he may have become restless and lonely. But his diary and his letters suggest exactly the opposite. He was a self-sufficient man. He had mental resources, and he kept himself occupied, methodically giving 'the forenoon to writing; the afternoon to the river, the woods, and classical poetry; the evening to philosophy'. Even as late as 15 December he wrote of himself as 'rooted like a tree on the banks of one bright river'. But the East India House offer must have had immediate attractions: for one thing, the freedom to write as he chose, without the necessity for hack-work. Other writers had made the same choice, from Chaucer onwards. In the last century, Dr Johnson, earning his living by his pen alone, had been regarded as the exception. Hogg was a barrister, Crabb Robinson had joined *The Times*, and Wordsworth was distributing stamps in Cumberland. What would have been unthinkable would have been to sacrifice his principles, as, in his view, Southey had done. But with the East India Company,

this would not apply. There was also the pleasing prospect of imaginative voyages up the great rivers of the East, which had fascinated him since the days of *Palmyra*.

Peacock completed his papers for the East India Company, and they were returned with the well-known comment: 'Nothing superfluous, nothing wanting', which, as J. B. Priestley has observed, is as good a summing-up as any of his prose style as a whole. He started work by Christmas, with two other successful candidates: James Mill, the Scottish political economist who had just made his mark with his *History of India*, and Edward Strachey, a distinguished ex-member of the Bengal Civil Service. Their work was reviewed, and approved, a few months later. The Minute in the Committee of Correspondence Report of 12 May 1819 says of Peacock: 'This Gentleman has been employed in the Examiner's Office since Christmas last, and has evinced talents which induce a belief that he is fitly qualified for any duties which he may be appointed to discharge.'

James Mill was then forty-six, Edward Strachey forty-five, and Peacock thirty-four. Their salaries were fixed at £1,000, £800, and £600 respectively, and backdated to Christmas, the appointments being finally confirmed in 1821. Each man was made a Provisional Assistant to the Examiner, M'Culloch, and, to compensate for any feeling among the existing staff a fourth Assistantship was created for J. J. Harcourt, with consequent internal promotions.

On 13 January Peacock wrote to Shelley from temporary lodgings at No. 5 York Street, Covent Garden; with typical caution, he waited to find permanent accommodation until his appointment was official. Shelley, fearing that his friend might be going the way of Southey, wrote to ask: 'What is it that you *do* at the India House?' He must have been somewhat reassured by Leigh Hunt's letter to Mary Shelley of 9 March:

> 'You have heard, of course, of Peacock's appointment in the India House; we joke upon his Oriental grandeur, his Brahminical learning, his inevitable tendencies to be one of the corrupt, upon which he seems to apprehend Shelleyan objurgations. It is an

honour to him that "prosperity" sits on him so well. He is very pleasant and hospitable.'[5]

We may echo Shelley's question: what did he do there? Being Peacock, he gave two contradictory answers, the first in the lines which are said to have given offence to Charles Lamb, who was on the permanent staff, in the Accounts Department, when Peacock joined:[6]

From ten to eleven, ate breakfast for seven;
From eleven to noon, to begin was too soon;
From twelve to one, asked, 'What's to be done?'
From one to two, found nothing to do;
From two to three, began to foresee
That from three to four would be a damned bore.

The first line of this little peom refers to the fact that, in those stately days, any employee arriving before ten was rewarded with a full breakfast. The other point is that, when Peacock arrived, the work was spasmodic: the mails from India arrived only twice a year. Before he left, they were arriving once a month.

In contrast to the verses just quoted, he wrote to Shelley on 13 January about his new appointment:

'It is not in the common routine of office, but is an employment of a very interesting and intellectual kind, connected with finance and legislation, in which it is possible to be of great service, not only to the Company, but to the millions under her dominion.'

In the autumn of 1819, Peacock proceeded to spring another surprise on his friends, and, even more so, on Jane Gryffydh, the younger daughter of the dumpy little parson and schoolmaster of Maentwrog, whom he had last met on his expedition to North Wales eight or nine years before. Imagine this girl, now living in a tiny hamlet with her widowed mother, receiving, out of the blue, this letter from London, on East India House notepaper:

Dear Jane,

It is more than eight years since I had the happiness of seeing you. I can scarcely hope that you may have remembered me as I

have remembered you: yet I feel confident that the simplicity and ingenuousness of your disposition will prompt you to answer me with the same candor with which I write to you. I have long entertained the hope of returning to Merionethshire under better auspices than those under which I left it: but fortune always disappointed me, continually offering me prospects which receded as I approached them. Recently she has made me amends for her past unkindness, and has given me much present good, and much promise of progressive prosperity, which leaves me nothing to desire in worldly advantage but to share it with you. The greatest blessing this world could bestow on me would be to make you my wife . . . consider if your own feelings will allow you to constitute my happiness. I desire only to promote yours: and I desire only you: for your value is beyond fortune, of which I want no more than I have.

On this, which is only the first part of Peacock's letter, J. B. Priestley has a dry comment:

'The suggested picture of himself as a man who has grappled with fortune for years and at last found his efforts rewarded is nicely calculated to arouse feminine sympathy, far more than any account of himself, as we have actually seen him, happily idling for years, and then luckily falling into a snug berth just when he needed one.'

Well, whoever won fair lady without the help of a few white lies? Peacock had waited until his fortunes allowed him to make this approach; this may be why he apparently made no attempt to see her during his second visit to Wales in 1813. On the other hand, he certainly had not pined in hopeless love in the meanwhile.

Leight Hunt saw the proposal as a move in a game of Peacockian chess: 'He glories in doing nothing except upon theory. . . . He fell in love, as it were, upon a gravitating principle. His passion, literally, as well as metaphysically, is quite problematical. Let B be Miss Jenkins, etc. . . .' But Harriet Love, commenting to Edith Nicolls on this letter of propsal (she was living with the Peacocks at the time) spoke of 'the feeling of bitter disappointment under

which it was written, and the unlooked-for call at East India House from an old acquaintance who suggested it'. She would never give the name of the caller. Was it Marianne de St Croix? There is perhaps a clue in that curious poem of reminiscence, 'Love and Age',[7] and a letter of Shelley's is relevant: 'I congratulate you on your choice. . . . If you had married Marianne I should never have seen much of you, but now at least I have a chance.'

On 30 November, from Bryntirrion, Tanybwlch, Jane Gryffydh sent her reply:

Dear Sir,

The gratification to hear of your Welfare has very often since you left Merionethshire been *much* my Wish. But I cannot say I have remembered you as I feel gratified to find you have remembered me—for I could not flatter myself that *your* Sentiments warranted such a remembrance on my part—which knowledge, as well as every expression of generosity your very handsome Epistle contains, claims my highest gratitude. I fear you *very* much over-rate my worth, and I must tell you that I am less calculated to be *your* Companion than I *even* was at the period you knew me: Fortune pouring on my defenceless head an unceasing succession of her Evils, thereby enervating my mind and disabling it from receiving its due cultivation: this consideration will I *hope* dispose *you* to pardon want of precision [sic] of style *and* all imperfections . . . .

. . . I possess *none* of the good things of this World. I shall say no more at present than beg you will believe me, with every sentiment of Esteem and a most grateful sense of your good opinion, etc.

Yours with the greatest sincerity,
Jane Gryffydh.

On 20 March 1820, 'Thomas Love Peacock of the Parish of Christchurch in the Country of Surrey, Bachelor, and Jane Gryffydh of the Chapelry of Eglysfach in the parish of Llanfirhangel geneur glyn' were married by licence in Eglwysfach Chapel, Cardiganshire, by the Reverend Lewis Evans, the witnesses being George Scott and George Jeffreys.

Peacock had yet another surprise to spring on his friends, and on Shelley particularly. Two years before, he had written his *Essay on Fashionable Literature*. *Nightmare Abbey*, written in that 'pivotal year', 1818, as Ian Jack has so aptly called it, suggested that a more radical shift of attitude was taking place. This was confirmed when, in June 1820, *Ollier's Miscellany* published *The Four Ages of Poetry*.[8]

This remarkable essay begins, deceptively, in a mood of cloistered calm:

> 'Poetry, like the world, may be said to have four ages, but in a different order: the first age of poetry being the age of iron; the second, of gold; the third, of silver; and the fourth, of brass.'

These four ages are now defined in turn, The first, or iron age of poetry, is that in which:

> '... rude bards celebrate in rough numbers the exploits of ruder chiefs, in days when every man is a warrior, and when the great practical maxim of society, "to keep what we have and catch what we can", is not yet disguised under the name of justice and law.'

Peacock then explains how the poets find a place in this dangerous primitive organization:

> 'The successful warrior becomes a chief, the successful chief becomes a king; his next want is an organ to disseminate the fame of his achievements, and the extent of his possessions; and this organ he finds in a bard, who is always ready to celebrate the strength of his arm, being first duly inspired by that of his liquor'.

The iron-age poets are, then, public relations officers, or laureates, for their warrior-kings:

> 'They tell us how many battles such an one has fought, how many helmets he has cleft, how many breastplates he has pierced, how many widows he has made, how much land he has appropirated, how many houses he has demolished for other people, what a large one he has built for himself, and how liberally and plentifully he pays, feeds, and intoxicated the divine and immortal bards,

the sons of Jupiter, but for whose everlasting signs the names of heroes would perish.'

The golden age begins when personal strength and courage has been 'checked by organized bodies, social institutions, and hereditary successions'. This puts the court bard in a rather delicate position:

'... there is no praise which a living poet can, without fear of being kicked to death for clumsy flattery, address to a living king, that will not leave the impression that the latter is not so great a man as his ancestors. The man must, in this case, be praised through his ancestors.'

This, says Peacock, is the age when ancient poetry attains perfection—in Homer, in Pindar, in Aeschylus and Sophocles. The maturity of poetry coincides with the infancy of history.[9] Men begin to inquire what is true:

'Speculations, too, and disputes, on the nature of man and mind; on moral duties and on good and evil; and on the animate and inanimate components of the visible world, begin to share their attentions with the eggs of Leda and the horns of Io.'

The silver age brings with it a new kind of poetry, which may be called the poetry of civilized life. This is of two kinds, the imitative and the original. The imitative recasts and repolishes the poetry of the age of gold: Virgil is the obvious example. The original is chiefly comic, didactic, or satiric—Menander, Aristophanes, Horace, Juvenal. But this state of poetry is a step towards its extinction.

'As the science of morals and of mind advances towards perfection ... poetry can no longer accompany them in their progress, but drops into the background, leaving them to advance alone.'

Then comes the age of brass:

'... which, by rejecting the polish and the learning of the age of silver, and taking a retrograde strike to the barbarisms and



crude traditions of the age of iron, professes to return to nature and revive the age of gold.'

Now we come to the point. Modern poetry also has its four ages. The warriors of the new iron age are Charlemagne and his Paladins, Arthur and his Knights. The poets of the new golden age are represented by Ariosto and Shakespeare. Milton stands between the ages of gold and silver. The silver age begins with Dryden, comes to perfection with Pope, and ends with Goldsmith, Collins, and Gray. And so to the new brass age, exemplified by:

'... that egregious confraternity of rhymesters, known by the name of the Lake Poets ... those shining models of purity and virtue, passing the whole day in the innocent and amiable occupation of going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions, and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations.'

As science and philosophy advance, these writers scramble in obscure gutters for their material.

'Mr Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruises for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek islands. Mr Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical; and when he has a common-place book full of monstrosities, strings them into an epic. Mr Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons; and Mr Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians, and the mysticism of German Metaphysics, and favours the world with visions in verse, in which the quadruple elements of sexton, old women, Jeremy Taylor, and Emanuel Kant are harmonized into a delicious poetical compound.'

Now that the cat is out of the bag, the problem is to get it back again. Peacock audaciously solves this by warpping up his true intent in a monstrous and overwhelming torrent of words as a

peroration. This defies quotation, since it stretches, in a single sentence, over more than two pages. He pictures a pyramid 'built into the upper air of intelligence' by politicians and economists, in which the contemporary poet has no part. The artificiality of the whole concept is pointed out by the Halliford editors when they write of 'the constant and cordial distrust which he entertained for both classes of men' How far he meant it all is one of those intriguing questions which he leaves to his readers.

If he intended to flutter the dovecotes, he succeeded. The Lake Poets preserved their customary silence, but Shelley was provoked to 'a sacred rage, or *cacoethes scribendi*, of vindicating the insulted Muses'. 'I hope', he wrote to *Ollier's* ,'soon to see a Treatise against the light of the Sun adorn your columns'. His answer to Peacock's essay was his celebrated *Defence of Poetry*. This was intended for *Ollier's Miscellany*, but when that periodical collapsed it was transferred to the *Liberal*. That came to an end in 1823, and the *Defence* was not printed until 1840, when Mary Shelley included it in Shelley's *Essays and Letters from Abroad*. The references to *The Four Ages*, which had been taken out by John Hunt of the *Liberal*, was not restored, so that, as Peacock said, 'the paper as it now stands is a defence without an attack'. The fact remains that, but for Peacock, we should never have had the *Defence*—nor, for that matter, the *Letters from Italy*. One of the many good turns H. L. B. Brett-Smith has done us is to edit, in one volume, Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*, Shelley's *Defence*, and Browning's *Essay on Shelley*.[10]

With his appointment to the East India Company, his marriage, and *The Four Ages of Poetry*, Peacock was shedding the skin of a previous existence. Only when the transformation had reached a certain stage was he able to turn his attention back to Sherwood Forest; and, when he did, he discovered that a Scots marauder had been there in the interval.

Chapter Thirteen

MAID MARIAN

Maid Marian appeared in March 1822, prefaced by the following sentence: 'This little work, with the exception of the last three chapter, was written in the autumn of 1818.'

This was because of the publication in December 1819 of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, which had also drawn upon Joseph Ritson's collection of Robin Hood Ballads, with the natural result of similarities between the two works. Peacock's disclaimer has not satisfied everybody. Sir Henry Newbolt has pointed out parallels even in Peacock's earlier chapters.[1] For instance, in both stories Robin Hood assumes the disguise of a priest, and even utters the same words, 'Pax vobiscum'. But disguises are the stock-in-trade of the Robin Hood legend, and it seems a little perverse to suggest that a priest, real or bogus, cannot say 'Pax vobiscum' without being indebted to Sir Walter Scott. Mayoux has shown in parallel columns how closely, at times, Peacock followed Ritson, and there seems no reason to doubt that he knew nothing of Sir Walter Scott's book when he wrote the greater part of his own.

Maid Marian is a character entirely of Peacock's own. To the cultural graces of an Anthelia she adds considerable athletic qualifications: she can 'fence, and draw the long bow, and play at single-stick and quarter-staff', but 'with such womanly grace and temperate self-command as if those manly exercises belonged to her only, and were become for her own sake feminine'. Had Sir John Betjeman been a young troubadour of the period, he would undoubtedly have addressed odes to her.

Similarly, Brother Michael is by no means the Friar Tuck of popular legend. His literary ancestor is Frére Jean des Entanmeures from Rabelais.[2] He loves his wine, and is the most loosely dedicated

of celibates, but with his eight-foot staff he is formidable a man in an affray. He also bursts into song at the least provocation:

Drink and sing, and eat and laugh,
And so go forth to battle:
For the top of a skull and the end of a staff
Do make a ghostly rattle.

Peacock's book attacks the reactionary post-war government of his time just as, in the previous century, John Gay had attacked the administration of Robert Walpole. But the satire is never allowed to weigh the story down. It dances with gaiety, and with the joys of the summer countryside that Peacock had experienced in the marvellous weather of 1818.

The opening chapter is virtually a ready-made film scenario. At the altar in the abbey-chapel of Rubygill, stands Matilda Fitz-water, arrayed and attended for her marriage to Robert FitzOoth, Earl of Huntingdon. Her father, Baron of Arlingford, is at her side, but the bridegroom has not arrived. Matilda looks back through the open gates of the chapel to where the narrow road winds along the side of the hill. The road is empty. In the organ loft, the blower makes a chink in the curtain and looks anxiously down. Then a distant trampling of horses is heard. Turning quickly, Matilda and her father see, on the road, the glitter of snowy plumes and the light of polished spears. The posse sweeps up to the chapel gates, and the earl, in full armour, strides down the aisle. The service begins. In the loft, the blower operates his musical air-pump with one hand, and holds the curtain aside with the other. Then there is the tramp of armed men. The blower stops blowing; the organist, his playing petering out in a wheezy rattle, is about to throw a book of anthems at his negligent assistant, when 'his hand and attention' are 'arrested by the scene below'. The leader of the armed intruders places himself, with drawn sword, opposite the abbot, and between the earl and Matilda, and cries: 'In the name of King Henry, I forbid the ceremony, and attach Robert Earl of Huntingdon as a traitor!'

The earl draws his sword and in a moment the chapel is a battle-ground. Kissing Matilda, and handing her to the baron, the earl fights his way out, supported by his bowmen at the door. One of

their arrows narrowly misses the abbot, who makes for the door leading to the abbey, the monks at his heels. He stumbles over his own drapery, falls prostrate, and is 'instantaneously buried under a pyramid of ghostly carcasses'. The peasantry, 'seeing a fair set-to', proceed to 'crack each other's skulls for the good of the king and the earl'. Brother Michael stands 'steadfastly watching the combat with his arms a-kimbo, the colossal emblem of an unarmed neutrality'.

The earl having escaped them, the contestants retreat to the abbey, where in the king's name they broach a pipe of the best wine. The friars join them, finding that their 'exhaustion of animal spirits' requires 'extraordinary refection'. The leader of the king's men, Sir Ralph Montfaucon, tells them that, for hunting the king's deer, with-holding payments to the Abbot of Doncaster, and other offences in defiance of the king's authority, Robert Earl of Huntingdon has been outlawed and that many a courtier will swear to King Henry to bring him in dead or alive. 'They must look to the brambles, then', says Brother Michael, and takes his own remark as a cue for a song that also occurs in *Melincourt:*

The bramble, the bramble, the bonny forest bramble,
Doth make a jest
Of silken vest,
That will through greenwood scramble,
The bramble, the bramble, the bonny forest bramble.

While the flask is 'kept moving', Brother Michael's praises of Matilda incite Sir Ralph to 'view her more nearly', and he persuades the friar to take him to Arlingford Castle the next morning. Baron Fitzwater of Arlingford is 'a gentleman of fierce and choleric temperament':

'He was lineally descended from the redoubtable Fierabras of Normandy, who came over to England with the Conqueror, and who, in the battle of Hastings, killed with his own hand four-and-twenty Saxon Cavaliers all in a row.'

Breakfasting when his uninvited visitors arrive, he looks up at

them fiercely, 'with his mouth full of beef and his eyes full of flame', and makes an 'awful bow' to the knight:

> '. . . inclining himself forward over the table and presenting his carving-knife *en militaire*, in a manner that seemed to leave it doubtful whether he meant to show respect to his visitor, or to defend his provision.'

A somewhat uneasy and smouldering conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Matilda. 'What', asks the Baron, 'are you doing with that green dress and that bow and arrow?' Matilda replied that she is going a-hunting. The Baron says that she must not.

'But I am going', said Matilda.
'But I will have up the drawbridge', said the Baron.
'But I will swim the moat', said Matilda.
'But I will secure the gates', said the Baron.
'But I will leap from the battlement', said Matilda.
'But I will lock you in an upper chamber', said the Baron.
'But I will shred the tapestry', said Matilda and let myself down'.
'But I will lock you in a turret', said the Baron, 'where you shall only see light through a loophole'.
'But through that loophole', said Matilda, 'will I take my flight, like a young eagle from its eerie . . . .'

There is only one way for this exchange to end: Matilda bursts into song. Brother Michael joins in, and soon they are singing together:

Little I reck of matin bell,
But drown its toll with my clanging horn:
And the only beads I love to tell
Are the beads of dew on the spangled thorn.

When they treat themselves to an encore with the refrain 'Yoicks! Hark away! and Tallyho!', the baron's wrath overflows. He seizes a 'vast dish of beef more than fifty ancient yeomen could eat' and whirls it across the room like a quoit, narrowly missing the friar's head. But Matilda knows how to handle her father. Tears start to

her eyes, which she turns away to conceal, and the baron is subdued at once. 'She has me in leading-strings', he complains to Sir Ralph, 'and that is the end of it'.

There follows the meeting of Sir Ralph and the Earl at the May Day celebrations on the estate of Sir Guy of Gamwell, whose son is apprehended, rescued from the gallows by Robin disguised as a friar, and introduced to the forest community, where he becomes Will Scarlet. Similarly, Brother Michael, expelled from Rubygill Abbey, becomes, in the forest, Friar Tuck. The only person who does not change his name is Little John, a former page at Gamwell Hall, since the name is already a misnomer, he being now seven feet high. It is he who was sent to dispatch three messages on blunt arrows, giving the alert that young Gamwell has been arrested. These arrows were fired into Arlingford Castle, into Rubygill Abbey, and into Sherwood Forest.

> 'Now the first of these arrows lighted in the nape of the neck of Lord Fitzwater, and lodged itself firmly between his skin and his collar; the second rebounded with the hollow vibration of a drumstick from the shaven sconce of the abbot of Rubygill; and the third pitched perpendicularly into the centre of a venison pasty in which Robin Hood was making incision.'

Now the story moves on. With the accession of Richard Coeur de Lion, there was some hope that the Earl of Huntingdon might have his estates restored to him. But when King Richard departed for the Crusades, his brother, Prince John, seized power,[3] and in the course of establishing strong points, visited Nottingham, where he noticed the charms of the lovely Matilda. Accordingly he dispatched his travelling minstrel, or laureate, Harpiton,[4] who, by the baron's order, was 'first tossed in a blanket and set in the stocks to cool, and afterwards ducked in the moat and set again in the stocks to dry'. Prince John retailiated by burning the baron's castle to the ground. We come, then, to a splendid scene in which the baron, wandering, one fine morning, homeless into Sherwood Forest, finds Robin Hood and the rest of his foresters, and his daughter Matilda with them. Brother Michael, now Friar Tuck, welcomes him with a voluble cadenza in praise of the sylvan scene:

'This goodly grove is our palace: the oak and the beech are its colonnade and its canpoy: the sun and the moon and the stars are its everlasting lamps: the grass, and the daisy, and the primrose, and the violet, are its many-coloured floor of green, white, yellow, and blue; the may-flower, and the woodbine, and the eglantine, and the ivy, are its decorations, its curtains, and its tapestry: the lark, and the thrush, and the linnet, and the nightingale, are its unhired minstrels and musicians . . . . '

Robin interrupts to say that only one thing is lacking: a queen of the forest. And there and then he invites Matilda to become his queen, under the forest name of Maid Marian. The baron protests in vain. As the turf is being piled into an altar, the friar propounds the doctrine that 'Might is Right':

'Your right was the stronger in Arlingford, and ours is the stronger in Sherwood. Your right was right as long as you could maintain it; so is ours. So is King Richard's, with all deference be it spoken; and so is King Saladin's. . . . And now if any of you know any just impediment—'

'Fire and fury', says the baron. Matilda attempts to console him. Perhaps, when King Richard returns from Palestine, he may restore Baron Fitzwater to his rights, and even do the same for the Earl of Huntingdon. But:

'. . . should that never be, should it be the will of fate that we must live and die in the greenwood, I will live and die MAID MARIAN.'

'A pretty resolution', said the baron, 'if Robin will let you keep it'.

'I have sworn it', said Robin . . . . 'Chastity is our forest law, and even the friar has kept it since he has been here.'

'Truly so' said the friar . . . . 'And now, dearly beloved—'

The friar 'went through the ceremony with great unction', and afterwards: 'The venison smoked, and the ale frothed, and the wine sparkled, and the sun went down on their unwearied festivity.'

The next morning, the laws of the forest society are, for the baron's edification, read over by Little John in a 'stentorophonic

voice'. 'Our government', runs one, 'is legitimate, and our society is founded on the one golden rule of right, consecrated by the universal consent of mankind, and by the practice of all ages, individuals, and nations: namely, To keep what we have, and to catch what we can.'[5]

An episode follows in which Robin, disguised as a harper, saves a young lady from a forced marriage—the echo of a scene in *Melincourt*. More disguises are assumed when as pilgrims Robin and Matilda take the old baron to join Sir Guy of Gamwell in the safety of Barndale. On the way, Robin leads them to a cottage by a stream in a valley, where friends of his, whom he has installed there, entertain them. A storm rises, but the baron, comfortable by the fire, says, 'Give me a roof over my head, be it never so humble'—a line which may have well suggested to the American, John Howard Payne, his famous song, 'Home Sweet Home'.[6] 'I like to feel myself safe', adds the baron—and at that moment they glimpse through the window an armed head, with its plumage tossing in the storm. The apparition disappears, but soon there are knocks on the door, 'as from the knuckles of an iron glove'. The cottager arms his guests with what ever weapons are available. himself he flourishes a cudgel, and his wife seizes a spit from the fireplace. The door bursts open, and a dozen men are standing there, there stream, now changed to a mighty torrent, roaring behind them. Once again, here is a scene with enormous filmic possibilities with a fine ingredient of slapstick in its action. One of the armed men is, of course, pushed into the river. The cottager's wife gets her spit jammed in the lintel of the door. This makes the intruders bend down as they enter, so 'submitting their necks to the sword'. Meanwhile, the wife, deprived of her spit, goes berserk with pots, pans, pipkins, and a brass cauldon. At last the leader is brought to his knees, and when his helmet is struck off is revealed as the persistent Sir Ralph Montfaucon. 'Slive him down, Mawd!' shouts the baron. But Mawd lets him go, on condition that he swears a convention never to pursue or molest Robin or her again. The knight has no alternative but to comply. Rounding off the episode, Peacock says: 'How well he kept his oath we shall have no opportunity of narrating: *Di lui la nostra istoria piu non parla*.' In other words, in the

less sensitive modern language of television, Sir Ralph Montfaucon is 'written out' of the story.

We come now to the last three chapters. In the first of these, the traditional scene is re-enacted of Robin carrying the friar across the river on his shoulders and dumping him in the water. But the scene has a truly Peacockian sequel. Robin and Matilda, returning from Yorkshire in the disguise of travelling minstrels, have found Friar Tuck in possession of a ferryman's cottage. The owner, says the friar, has been sent on an errand so that he himself can use the cottage for meditation. But, at midnight, they hear a voice crying, 'Over!', and as they come out from the cottage they see a figure in white gliding away through the trees on the opposite bank. Over a glass of wine, the friar explains, in song of course, that there is a local tradition of a ghost: a maiden had come there each night to meet her lover, had been swept away by the floods in a storm, and the spot is still haunted by her spirit:

And when the storms of midnight rave,
While clouds the broad moon cover,
The wild gusts waft across the wave
  The cry of, 'Over, over!'

But Matilda counters with another explanation:

In lonely hut himself he shut,
The friar of Rubygill;
Where the ghostly elf absolved himself
To follow his own goodwill:
And he had no lack of canary sack
To keep his conscience still.
And a damsel well knew, when at lonely midnight
It gleamed on the waters, his signal-lamp-light:
'Over! over!' she warbled with nightingale throat,
And the friar sprung forth at the magical note,
And she crossed the dark stream in his trim ferry-boat,
With the friar of Rubygill.

Robin declares that the friar is blushing; and the friar makes his famous reply:

"'I think", said the friar, "you never saw one that blushed not, or you saw good canary thrown away. But you are welcome to laugh if it so please you. None shall laugh in my company, though it be at my expense, but I will have my share of the merriment. The world is a stage, and life is a farce, and he that laughs most has most profit of the performance".'

In the final sequence a strange knight riding through the forest is invited, without the option of refusal, to dine at Robin's table, with a bill, according to his purse, to follow. The friar makes a speech comparing Robin's forest kingdom with the greater kindom of that greater king, Coeur-de-Lion, to whom one and all pledge their loyalty: which is just as well, for the stranger is then revealed as Richard, King of England, travelling incognito. Then King personally solemnizes the marriage of Robin and Marian, and offers a position at court to any who will follow him. But that is not quite the end. As they leave Sherwood, the foresters look back with heavy hearts, particularly the friar:

Ye pleasant sights of leaf and flower;
  Ye pleasant sounds of bird and bee:
Ye sports of deer and sylvan bower:
  Ye feasts beneath the greenwood tree:
Ye baskings in the vernal sun:
  Ye slumbers in the summer dell:
Ye trophies that this arm has won:
  And must ye hear your friar's farewell?

At that time, Peacock had himself, once again, exchanged the countryside for the city. Like the friar, he no doubt hoped that his farewell was not to be for ever; and in his novel, on the death of King Richard and the usurpation of John, the men of the greenwood 'flocked again round their forest banner: . . . and in merry Sherwood they lived long together, the lady still retaining her former name of Maid Marian, though the appellation was then as much a misnomer as that of Little John'.

Critics have pounced on the anachronisms and inaccuracies in Peacock's romance. The characters spend a great deal of their

time drinking canary wine, but the Canaries were not rediscovered till after the twelfth century. There were no pictures on castle walls, and wives did not wear miniatures of their husbands away at the Crusades. Robin Hood was not descended from FitzOoth, and Fierebras cannot have unhorsed any Saxons at the Battle of Hastings, because they fought on foot. Little John's two mile range with the longbow was well beyond human capability; so, for that matter, was Baron Fitzwater's 'discobolic exploit' with the breakfast dish. Peacock was writing in a carefree mood. But woe betide anyone who took similar liberties with Ancient Athens, as, in a few years, Thomas Moore, the author of *The Epicurean*, was to learn to his cost.[7]

Shelley's friend Maria Gisborne wrote to him on 28 April 1822, saying that the book had not taken, and that Ollier attributed this to a priest's being made a figure of fun. However, it was read by the actor Charles Kemble, who placed it in the hands of the librettist, J. R. Planché. Planché took his script to Hookham, and offered him the refusal.

> 'This offer Mr Hookham declined in terms it would be unflattering to call courteous, and all but threatened to prevent the performance of the opera as an infringement of his copyright. . . . In consequence of Mr Hookham's behaviour, I called on Mr Peacock at India House, and was most cordially received by him.'[8]

Maid Marian, or the Huntress of Arlingford, was produced at Covent Garden on 3 December 1822, with music by Sir Henry Rowley Bishop. Charles Kemble played the Friar, and scored a hit with his singing of 'The bramble, the bramble'. Thackeray described the play as 'all the rage'. It had twenty-eight performances within fourteen months, and was also presented at the Park Theatre, New York. The book went quickly into a second edition and was afterwards translated into French and German. Planché claimed, no doubt with justification, that the success of the opera boosted the sales, not only of *Maid Marian*, but of Peacock's other novels.[10]

Chapter Fourteen

LONDON AND LOWER HALLIFORD

The various surprises which Peacock sprang on Shelley after his departure to Italy did not impair their friendship, even if what Shelley wrote to Peacock and what he wrote to other people were sometimes at variance. As we have seen, he wrote to congratulate Peacock on his marriage; but soon afterwards he wrote to Maria Gisborne:

> And there
> Is English Peacock, with his Mountain Fair
> Turned into a Flamingo;—that shy bird
> That gleams i' the Indian air—have you not heard
> When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
> His best friends hear no more of him?—but you
> Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
> With the milk-white Snowdonian Antelope
> Matched with this camelopard. His fine wit...[1]

Maria Gisborne had, with her husband, recently come to London, having met the Shelleys in Italy. The introduction to Peacock effected by Shelley was similarly ambivalent. He wrote telling Peacock that Gisborne was a bore; and Maria Gisborne wrote to Mary Shelley saying that the Peacocks had not yet approached them, and that, in view of what Mary had said, perhaps it was just as well. When the meeting did occur, it was a success, and Mrs Gisborne wrote to Mary Shelley to say that it was one of the pleasantest evenings they had spent since they had arrived.

In addition to his other activities, Peacock was virtually acting as Shelley's London agent. He corrected the proofs of *Prometheus Unbound*, and he was asked to recommend *The Cenci* to Convent

Garden. He warned Shelley that, in its existing state, he had little hope of its being accepted. Shelley then wrote to Maria Gisborne:

'I have just heard from Peacock, saying that he don't think my tragedy will do, and that he don't much like it. But I ought to say, to blunt the edge of his criticism, that he is a nursling of the exact and superficial school in poetry.'

Peacock offered it to Covent Garden, as directed, and, as he had aniticpated, it was turned down, one of the reasons given being its 'repulsive subject'. Long afterwards, in his *Memoirs of Shelley*, Peacock wrote about it:

'It is unquestionably a work of great dramatic power, but it is as unquestionably not a work for the modern English stage. It would have been a great work in the days of Massinger . . . but he could not clip his wings to the littleness of acting drama. . . . If his life had been prolonged. I still think he would have accomplished something worthy of the best days of theatrical literature.'

Another occasion on which Peacock must have caused displeasure was when he wrote placing Shelley, as it were, as a runner-up to Byron:

'*Cain* is very fine; *Sardanapalus* I think finer; *Don Juan* is best of all. I have read nothing else in recent literature that I think good for anything. The poetry of your *Adonais* is very beautiful; but when you write you never think of your audience. The number who understand you, and sympathize with you, is very small.'

Peacock was also kept busy trying to tidy up Shelley's practical affairs. A particular source of irritation was a box of papers, held by Shelley's landlord at Great Marlow against arrears of rent. It was never recovered, and its loss is said to have led to a number of Shelley forgeries. In 1821 we even find Shelley asking Peacock to get him a job with the East India Company. He seems to have seen himself as some sort of adviser to a Maharaja. Peacock diplomatically replied that such posts were filled only by 'the Company's covenanted servants'; but he added:

> 'There is nothing that would give me so much pleasure (because I think there is nothing that would be more beneficial to you) than to see you following some scheme of flesh and blood—some interesting matter connected with the business of life, in the tangible shape of a practical man, and I shall make it a point of sedulous enquiry.'

In the same letter, he mentions the birth of 'a charming little girl (now eleven weeks old)', who 'flourishes delightfully in this fumose and cinerous atmosphere'. This was Mary Ellen, whose disastrous marriage to George Meredith was to bring such sorrow to Peacock in his later years.

In Italy, Byron and Claire were fighting over their daughter, Allegra, with Shelley wearing the mantle of Peacock in the unlikely role of peacemaker. Leigh Hunt arrived, to co-operate on a new periodical which Byron had christened the *Liberal*. Then came the tragedy of 8 July 1822. Shelley had a friend, Captain Williams, whole boat, the *Don Juan*, had been designed to his own specification, and against the advice of his Genoese boatbuilder. Peacock, who knew about these things, tells us in the *Memoirs* that 'it took two tons of ballast to bring her down to bearings, and she was very crank in a breeze'. This is his account of what happened:

> 'On the afternoon of the 8th of July, 1822, after an absence of some days from home, Shelley and Williams set sail from Leghorn for their home on the Gulf of Spezzia. Trelawny[2] watched them from Lord Byron's vessel, the *Bolivar*. The day was hot and calm. Trelawny said to his Genoese mate, "They will soon have the land breeze". "Maybe", said the mate, "they will soon have too much breeze. That gaff-topsail is foolish in a boat with no deck and no sailor aboard. Look at those black lines, and the dirty rags hanging under them out of the sky. Look at the smoke on the water. The devil is brewing mischief".'

Shelley's boat disappeared in a fog. A thunderstorm burst, and when it was over and the fog had cleared, Shelley's boat was not there. Some days later, the bodies of the two friends and the boy who had been with them were washed ashore.[3] Shelley's remains

were interred in the Protestant cemetery in Rome. It fell to Peacock to break the news to Sir Timothy Shelley, which he did with great dignity in a letter of 6 August, pointing out that the widow and her infant son were left without any provision. The son, Percy Bysshe, had been born in Florence on 12 November 1819, and baptized there in January 1820. He was the only surviving child of the marriage. Peacock had the baptismal certificate entered in the register of St. James's, Westminster. As sole executor (Byron had excused himself from the legacy) he now set about trying to extract some money from Sir Timothy on behalf of Mary and her infant son. It was like getting blood out of a stone. Sir Timothy's limit was £100 a year, but his lawyer, William Whitton, as helpful as he could be in his position, explored the possibilities of a reversion. Mary had no patience with these delicate negotiations. 'Is not Peacock very lukewarm and insensible in this affair?' she asked Maria Gisborne in a letter of 17 September. William Godwin, asked the same question, replied that Peacock was not lukewarm but assiduous. Then Mary, though well aware of Sir Tomothy's aversion to seeing anything of Shelley's or hers in print, tried to raise money by getting John Hunt to publish Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* with a preface of her own. Peacock, who had known nothing about it till he heard from Whitton, when 300 copies had already been sold, managed to get the rest withdrawn. He also prevented the publication of a companion volume of prose.

In 1825 Sir Timothy agreed to a further £100, but when, in the following year, Mary again rushed into print with her novel, *The Last Man*, 'by the author of Frankenstein', he sent £50 with a curt statement that no more was to be expected. After the death of Charles, Shelley's son by Harriet, Sir Timothy would still have nothing to do with Mary, but was persuaded to see her son, who was now the heir, in the presence of a solicitor, and agreement was finally fixed for an allowance of £250 per annum. As the Halliford editors remark, few executors have earned their legacy so well.

Peacock seems to have shown little desire to keep in touch with members of Shelley's circle. He attended Leigh Hunt's Twelfth Night party in January 1819 and met Keats there, but when it came to finding a permanent residence in London, he chose Stamford

Street, Blackfriars, well away from the poets' colony in Hampstead. We do hear of one rather embarrassing visit:

'Some years ago it entered the imagination of Hunt and Keats, and some others of that coterie, to crown themselves with laurels, and take off their cravats. This was the jaunty thing, and quite poetical. While the coroneted and uncravated company were sitting thus one day, "with their singing robes about them", Peacock came in. "Do", said a lady who officiated as coronet manufacturer, "do, dear Mr. Peacock, let me weave you a chaplet and put it on your head; then you will all sit as poets together."

'"No, ma'am", said Peacock, wiping his head, "no, ma'am; you may make a fool of your own husband, but there is no need of your making a fool of me".'[4]

Peacock's relations with Keats were never good. In March 1818, Keats had complained to Benjamin Haydon, the painter, that people, 'by associating with the best things, spoil them. Hunt has damned Hampstead and masks and sonnets and the Italian lakes. . . . Wordsworth has damned the lakes . . . Peacock has damned satire'. In December 1820, Peacock wrote to Shelley, 'If I should live to the age of Methusalem, and have uninterrupted literary leisure, I should not find time to read Keats's *Hyperion*.'[5]

Another writer with whom he failed to hit it off was Charles Lamb. Harriet Love, who was living with the Peacocks in London during this period, does not recollect ever seeing them in each other's company. Lamb was also on the staff of East India House, though in another department.[6] Sir William Foster, in his history of East India House, suggests that they must have met at the annual office feast:

'It may have been at one of these gatherings Lamb—according to a story by Mr. Lucas—sat opposite to T. L. Peacock, and, on the latter asking him what sort of an egg that was in front of him, replied, "The kind of egg that a drunken peacock would lay"!'

The letter to Shelley in which Peacock disparaged *Hyperion* suggests a weariness, or impatience, with the London literary scene: 'there is no longer a poetical audience among the higher class

of minds'. 'The poetical reading public' was 'composed of the mere dregs of the intellectual community'. At first, at any rate, he held his own 'monthly symposia'—Shelley wrote to say that he would attend 'in imagination'. But Shelley would not have known everybody there. One new friend was Walter Coulson, the 'admirable' Coulson whom the Gisbornes met at their first visit to the Peacocks. Coulson, having been amanuensis to Jeremy Bentham, went on to edit the *Globe and Traveller*. Another was Albany Fonblanque, who took over the editorship of the *Examiner in* the early thirties. For a period of years, Peacock wrote musical notices for both these periodicals. But a novelist does not become a music critic overnight, and Peacock must have spent much of his spare time in the twenties cultivating friends in the musical world. Victor Novello was one of them, and there must have been many others. Says Edith Nicolls: 'On Tuesday evenings, during the season, he seldom failed to take his seat in the centre of the first row of the pit, having Fop's Alley between him and the orchestra; in those days there were no stalls, and no conductor like Costa.'

But his main concern was his work at East India House. His appointment, with those of James Mill and Edward Strachey, was confirmed by ballot on 10 April 1821. In April 1823, James Mill was appointed Assistant Examiner, and a month later his son, John Stuart Mill, entered the company as a clerk at the age of seventeen. When James Mill died in 1836, Peacock succeeded him as Chief Examiner, and on his own retirement twenty years later the post went to John Stuart Mill, for the last two years of the East India Company's existence.

It is ironic that Peacock, of all people, should have spent so many years of his life sandwiched between a Scots political economist and a Scots philosopher. Peacock's relationship with the father seems to have been correct but guarded.[7] Mill was a humourless man, who applied his dour views on education to his own son, to the extent of forcing him, in 1826, into a nervous breakdown. With the son, Peacock seems to have been equally reserved. Much has seems to have been equally reserved. Much has been made of the fact that Peacock's name does not occur in John Stuart Mill's autobiography. But too intimate a relationship with either one of

them might easily have lead to friction with the other, and the Mills were fortunate to have a man of such prudence and control between them.[8]

We get a glimpse of their attitudes to each other from the autobiography of a young man who called at East India House in 1824. This was John Roebuck who, as a small boy, had been impressed by Peacock's poetry and his paper boats when he had stayed at their home in Leicestershire:

> 'In the year 1824 I returned to England from Canada. Among the friends of my mother's was the well-known scholar T. L. Peacock, to whom I took a letter of introduction. After a short conversation, he said, "I think I can introduce you to a young friend of mine who belongs to a *disquisition* set of young men"—I remember the word was new to me—"and you may find his acquaintance agreeable and useful".'

Peacock then took him to the room of John Stuart Mill. Through him Roebuck met Jeremy Bentham and spent the rest of his life as an ardent Utilitarian. Robuck's picture is of a perfectly cordial relationship between Peacock and the younger Mill, with the father an aloof figure in the background. Jeremy Bentham was much more to Peacock's taste. They are said to have dined together weekly. Some people have been puzzled by this friendship with Bentham. There seems to me to be a perfectly simple explanation: both men had a keen sense of humour. Lord Houghton has been accused of over-emphasizing Peacock's preoccupation with the eighteenth century, but he was certainly right when he wrote that it '.. enabled him to mix with our self-satisfied and malcontent society in the spirit of an older time, before all the sherry was dry, and all the beer bitter, and when men of thought were not ashamed of being merry'.

For similar reasons, Peacock was drawn to Edward Strachey, whom Carlisle paints as '... a genially abrupt man ... sharply impatient of pretence, of sham, and untruth in all its forms who scorned cheerfully "the general humbug of the world" ... A man of many qualities: comfortable to be near.'

Contrast with this the dourness of the Mills. Edith Nicolls says

that they were not sufficiently 'expansive' for Peacock—an understatement amply compensated for, in the case of the younger Mill, by Mayoux:

> '..*physiquement rabourgi, maladif, nerveux, tendre, était le vrai produit de la formidable education paternelle, d'un gavage méthodique qui hypertrophie en lui-même un seul organ dépens les autres· le cerveau. . . . Un cerveau intensement actif dans un corps chétif, plus ou moins phthisique, et a bon droit méprise de lui-meme, tel fut John Stuart Mill . . . simplement humain, il ne le fut majais.*'

Edward Strachey, who had joined the East India Company at the same time as Peacock, was the second son of Sir Henry Strachey, Bart., MP, who had been Clive's secretary. His own son, Sir Edward Strachey, first met Peacock in 1827 and remembered him as 'a kindly, genial, and laughter-loving man, rather fond of good eating and drinking, or at least of talking as if he were so'. Here is one of the stories Strachey tells:

> 'One day [Peacock] came to my father's room and said, with much indignation, "I will never dine with Mill again, for he asks me to meet only political economists. I dined with him last night, when he had Musket and MacCulloch,[10] and after dinner Musket took a paper out of his pocket and began to read: "In the infancy of society, when Government was invented to save a percentage—say 3½ per cent"—on which he was stopped by MacCulloch with, "I will say no such thing', meaning that this was not the proper percentage".'

Strachey also reports that Coulson once asked Peacock: 'When I know Mill well, shall I like him—will he like what I like and hate what I hate?' Peacock replied: 'No, he will hate what you hate, and hate everything you like'.

But Peacock was not content merely to criticize James Mill behind his back. Strachey relates how once, when they stopped at an inn and were served with a tough beefsteak, Mill produced a number of reasons why the steak should be tender, and so decided it was. 'Yes', said Peacock, 'but as usual all the reason is on your side, and all the proof on mine'. Another story of Peacock rebuking Mill is in

Sir M. E. Grant Duff's *Notes from a Diary*. After Bentham's death his body was dissected, as he had instructed in his will. Mill came to Peacock and told him that the surgeons had discovered in his head an oil that was virtually unfreezable and suggested that it might be used for oiling chronometers at high altitudes. Peacock replied, 'The less you say about that, Mill, the better it will be for *you*; because if the fact becomes known, just as we see now in the papers advertisements to the effect that a fine bear is to be killed for his grease, we shall be having advertisements that a fine philosopher is to be killed for his oil'. After such a macabre story, it is comforting to quote another *mot* of Peacock's ,when he and Sir Edward Strachey passed a man with a packet of *Edinburgh Reviews*. 'There', Peacock remarked, 'goes a lot of lies and bad grammar'.

Through the Mills, Peacock met Henry Cole, then 'a government clerk of eighteen employed upon the records kept in the Tower', and when he moved his family to Surrey, Peacock let the Stamford Street house to Cole, reserving two rooms for his own use.

This move took place in 1823. Mary Ellen had been born in July 1821, and when a further child was expected he obtained two adjacent cottages at Lower Halliford, on the banks of the Thames, and had them made into the house that was to be his home for the rest of his life. A second daughter, Margaret Love, was born in that year, and then a son, Edward Gryffydh. There being no railway as yet, the household was efficiently run by his mother, and Peacock came down at weekends. In 1826 came the first of his private tragedies. On 13 January, at the age of three, Margaret Love died. Sir Edward Strachey tells the story:

> 'My father and one or two other friends were spending Saturday and Sunday with Peacock at his cottage. . . . The child was thought to be getting better and Peacock went out in high spirits for a walk with his friends. When they came back he was told that the child was dead. His grief was great, and he said to my father that there were times when the world could not be made fun of.'

He wrote an epitaph, which started an argument with the Vicar of Chertsey:

Long night succeeds they little day;
Oh blighted blossom! can it be,
That this grey stone, and grassy clay,
Have clos'd our anxious care of thee?

The half-form'd speech of artless thought
That spoke a mind beyond thy years;
The song, the dance, by nature taught;
The sunny smiles, the transient tears;

The symmetry of face and form,
The eye with light and life replete;
The little heart so fondly warm,
The voice so muscially sweet;

These, lost to hope, in memory yet
Around the hearts that lov'd thee cling,
Shadowing, with long and vain regret,
The too fair promise of thy spring.

The Vicar of Chertsey's objection was that there was no mention of God. But Peacock had his way, and the verses were inscribed on the child's tombstone.

A few days later, a little village girl passed the house: she was uncannily like Margaret Love. Jane Peacock coaxed her in with a promise of cake and dressed her in the dead child's clothes. Says Edith Nicolls:

'My grandfather, on his return from town, looked in through the dining-room as he passed round to the door of the house, and seeing the child standing on the hearthrug in the room, he was so struck by its likeness to Margaret, that he afterwards declared that he felt quite stunned, for the moment believing that he really saw her again before him.'

The little girl's name was Mary Rosewall. She was adopted by the Peacocks, and proved, Edith Nicolls tells us, 'a most devoted and unselfish daughter'. Her loyalty and affection were a great solace to Peacock in his old age. Jane never recovered from the

death of her child. She bore Peacock another daughter, Rosa Jane, but she remained an invalid and unable to deal with the practical side of domestic life. When Peacock's mother died in 1833, she left a void that never was and never could be filled.

Meanwhile, in July 1821—a poem had appeared in the *Globe and Traveller*, under the pseudonym of Peter Peppercorn, MD. It was called 'Rich and Poor', and was occasioned by a remark made by William Wilberforce. His Society for the Suppression of Vice[11] had been attacked by a Dr Lushington for concentrating its energies on the poor rather than the rich. On 3 July Wilberforce had replied that 'The Rich have means of concealing their transgressions which the Poor cannot': Peacock's poem appeared a few days later, on 9 July. Here are some of its verses.

'RICH AND POOR'

The poor man's sins are glaring;
In the face of ghostly warning
He is caught in the fact
Of an overt act—
Buying greens on Sunday morning.

The rich man's sins are hidden
In the pomp of wealth and station;
And escape the sight
Of the children of light,
Who are wise in their generation.

The rich man has a kitchen,
And cooks to dress his dinner,
The poor who would roast
To the bake must post,
And thus becomes a sinner...

The rich man is invisible
In the crowd of his gay society;
But the poor man's delight
Is a sore in the sight
And a stench in the nose of piety.[12]

The poem appeared subsequently in several variations, and was sometimes attributed to the Reverend Thomas Barham of the *Ingoldsby Legends;* but Peacock later included it with the *Paper Money Lyrics*.[13]

These were occasioned by the financial crisis of the winter of 1825–6. In November two large banks in the west and north stopped payment and it was feared that London banks might do the same, until confidence was restored the following March. As Peacock puts it:

The Country banks are breaking;
The London banks are shaking;
Suspicion is awaking;
E'en quakers now are quaking.

Typical of these *Lyrics*, of which, according to family tradition, Peacock was particularly fond, is the one in which Mr MacFungus, the banker, addresses an angry group of citizens who are demanding their balances:

A weel, sirs, what's the matter?
An' hegh, sirs, what's the clatter?
    Ye dinna ken,
    Ye seely men,
Yur fortunes ne'er were batter....

Instead o' glourin' hither,
    Ye'd better, I conjecture,
Just hoot awa' the githor,
    To hear our braw chief lacture.

His economic science
    Wad silence a' your clanking,
An' teach you some reliance
    On the preenciples o' banking.

At the time, the *Paper Money Lyrics* were circulated privately,[14] and it is a fair guess that one of the first to hear them was Jeremy Bentham, at those weekly dinners which he and Peacock took together.

In 1827, the foundation stone of London University was laid. Peacock made an English version of the Latin insciption, in which he took the opportunity to point to a grammatical howler in the Latin original. But James Mill was a Founder of the University, and Peacock's poem therefore joined the *Paper Money Lyrics* in private circulation.

In October, 1827, Peacock was asked to write a notice for the *Westminster Review* of Thomas Moore's *The Epicurean.* For an understanding of Peacock, this is as important as anything he ever wrote. He disliked the book intensely: 'This picture of an Epicurean . . . could only have been hazarded by a confident reliance on the profound ignorance of everything classical, which characterizes the vast majority of the reading public. . . '

Thomas Moore, with his loose writing and his hazy scholarship, was an easy target. For instance, when Moore writes: 'I stood before the Pyramids of Memphis, and saw them towering aloft, like the watch-towers of Time, from whose summit when he expires he will look his last', Peacock comments, 'This is a very infelicitous conceit. The peak of a pyramid must be an uncomfortable dying-bed even for Time.'

The truth is, he says, that the sublime is beyond Moore's grasp: 'In aiming at it without adequate power, he only achieves, as many worthy aspirants have done before him, a pompous seizure of its close neighbour the ridiculous.' What is more interesting, though, is what Peacock has to say, not about Moore, but about Epicurus himself:

'Epicurus taught that happiness is the end of life: that there is no happiness without pleasure; that the true and only pleasure of man is peace of body and mind: that the state in which the body is without pain, and the mind without perturbation, is the perfect health of the whole man.'

Then, having stated the principles of Epicureanism, Peacock brings them into line with Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism:

'Epicurus says in the *Κύριοι δόξαι* that 'Natural justice is the symbol of utility. . . . If any do a thing which is generally held to

be just, and yet it result not to the common benefit of society, it no longer has the true character of justice".' Thus Epicurus first taught that general utility, or, as Bentham expresses it, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number", is the legitimate end of philosophy. . . . '

Peacock ends by returning to the charge. Thomas Moore can do nothing right. He falls into the trap of regarding Cleopatra as a dusky beauty. She was, Peacock insists, a pure Greek, the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes.[15] As for Moore's footnotes, they are: ' . . . a vain parade of scraps and fragments, which will be found, on due examination, to be not the relics of a rich table, but the contents of a beggar's purse'. In short: 'He has drawn a portrait of everything that an eminent Epicurean was not, and presents it to us as a fair specimen of what he was. Hamlet's uncle might as fairly have sat for the portrait of Hamlet's father.'

This is Peacock, not with a knife, but with a scalpel. But he is so occupied with his task of dissection that he forgets his habitual reserve. The Halliford editors say: 'As a piece of cool and detached destructive criticism, the review is a masterly piece of writing; to those who know the views of the writer, it is also in some sort a confession of faith.'[16]

Between 1826 and 1827 Peacock explored the idea of *A Pilgrim of Province*, based on an unfinished story by Fontenelle. He tried it in dramatic form, and as a prose narrative, but abandoned both, presumably to work on his *The Misfortunes of Elphin*.

Chapter Fifteen

THE MISFORTUNES OF ELPHIN

Peacock's second historical romance appeared in 1829, seven years after *Maid Marian*. It is set in Wales, in the sixth century. One of his sources was the *Cambro-Briton*, a monthly periodical which ran for three years from 1819. But he also made use of the *Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, which is largely in Welsh, and also of the *Mabinogion* and the Hanes *Taliesin*, neither of which had been translated into English at the time. It is a fair assumption that Jane Gryffydh worked with him on the book, a co-operation which must have provided a happy link between them while Peacock's work kept him in London during the week, and which may have been valuable in occupying Jane's mind after the death of her little daughter, Margaret.

Peacock uses two Welsh legends: the inundation of the plain of Gwaelog through the negligence of the Falstaffian drunkard Prince Seithenyn (the accent is on the middle syllable), and the story of Taliesin, the bard of mystical birth. Both these characters are larger than life, Taliesin having a supernatural power over events, and Seithenyn a sublime indifference to them. Elphin, whose 'misfortunes' give the novel its title, is the mere mortal who has to take the buffets of fate as they come. The stories are combined through Taliesin's marriage to Elphin's daughter, Melanghel, which does not occur in the Welsh originals. The background is enlarged to include King Arthur and his neighbouring kings, whose variations on the theme of 'Might is Right' expose them to the menace of the Saxons. But this widening of the canvas does not result in the story losing its way, as in *Melincourt*. It is an admirable composition of poetry, satire and adventure. Herbert Wright has described it as 'one of the few masterpieces in English which sprang from the

eighteenth century Celtic revival'.[1] This is how Peacock begins his story:

> 'In the beginning of the sixth century, when Uther Pendragon held the nominal sovereignty of Britain over a number of petty kings, Gwythno Garanhir was king of Caredigion. The most valuable portion of his dominions was the Great Plain of Gwaelod, an extensive tract of level land, stretching along that part of the seacoast which now belongs to the counties of Merioneth and Cardigan.'

This district, populous and highly cultivated, was protected by an embankment, which had withstood the waves for centuries; but a moonstruck bard had warned King Gwythno 'to beware of the oppression of Gwenhidwy'—that is, of *Gwen-hudiw*, 'the white alluring one', the name, Peacock tells us, of a mermaid used figuratively for the power of the sea. Gwythno had therefore had a palace built in the lower slopes of the hills, beyond the danger area. There was a series of watch-towers along the embankment, whose guards were subordinate to a central castle commanding the seaport, where lived the Arglwyd Gorwarcheidwad yr Argae Breninawl, or Lord High Commissioner of Royal Embankments, who executed his office 'as a person so denominated might be expected to do: he drank the profits, and left the embankment to his deputies, who left it to their assistants, who left it to itself'. The name of this grand official was Prince Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi.

It so happened that one of the tower-guards, more conscientious than most, by name Teithrin ap Tathral, wandered one day beyond the limits of his own part of the embankment, and was so appalled by what he saw that he went straight to King Gwythno's palace. But the king was in a state of *awen*: that is to say, he was composing an ode in a 'rapturous and abstracted state of poetical inspiration', and could not be disturbed. Teithrin therefore went to look for the king's son, Prince Elphin, who was fishing in a mountain stream. The monotonous music of the water had lulled the Prince into a state of dreamy meditation, but there was a sudden gust of wind, in which he seemed to hear the words: 'Beware the oppression of Gwenhidwy'. It was the season of spring-tides, and Teithrin's

report, with the warning in the wind, made Elphin hurry to Prince Seithenyn's castle, taking Teithrin with him.

They found a monumental banquet in progress, with the Prince and his household singing a jovial chorus:

> Seithenyn ap Seithyn, the generous, the bold,
> Drinks the wine of the stranger from vessels of gold;
> But we from the horn, the blue silver-rimmed horn,
> Drink the ale and the mead in our fields that were born.
>
> The ale-froth is white, and the mead sparkles bright;
> They both smile apart, and with smiles they unite:
> The mead from the flower, and the ale from the corn,
> Smile, sparkle, and sing in the buffalo horn.

When the song was finished, Siethenyn noticed Elphin and Teithrin, and greeted them in a memorable exchange:

'You are welcome all four.'
Elphin answered, 'We thank you: we are but two.'
'Two or four', said Seithenyn, 'all is one. You are welcome all. . . .'

They attempted to warn him that the embankment was in a state of dangerous decay. Seithenyn replied in a speech 'modelled', says David Garnett, 'on the arguments used by the opponents of Reform who exaggerated the dangers of tampering in any way with the British Constitution'.[2]

> 'Decay is one thing, and danger is another. Every thing that is old must decay. That the embankment is old, I am free to confess: that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; that it is any the worse for that, I do most sturdily gainsay. . . . If it were all sound, it would break by its own obstinate stiffness: the soundness is checked by the rottenness, and the stiffness is balanced by the elasticity. There is nothing so dangerous as innovation. . . . It is well: it works well; let well alone. Cup-bearer, fill.'

In vain Teithrin protested that the level of the sea had materially altered. Seithenyn countered by commanding him to alter the level

of the bowl of wine before him. The scene ends in a typical débâcle: Seithenyn dropping his cup, reaching for it, losing his balance and the rest stumbling over him in the kind of confusion usually reserved by Peacock for the members of holy brotherhoods.

The tumult had drawn from her chamber Seithenyn's beautiful daughter, Angharad. At her directions, Seithenyn, already asleep, was carried off to bed by his cupbearers. Gazing with delight on this beautiful lady, Elphin 'paused for a moment to collect his ideas : then he said, 'It seems a stormy night'. This conversational opening proving abortive, there was another 'pause of deep silence'. Then, once again '. . . a voice, that seemed one of the many voices of the wind, pronounced the ominous words, "Beware of the oppression of Gwenhidwy' .' While Elphin and Angharad looked at each other in wonder, the 'whole violence of the equinoctial tempest seemed to burst upon the shore':

> 'It was one of those tempests which occur once in several centuries, and which, by their extensive devastations, are chronicled to eternity; for a storm that signalizes its course with extraordinary destruction, becomes as worthy of celebration as a hero for the same reason.'

So, at any rate, thought the old bard. For, while the rest listened to the storm in apprehension, the *awen* came upon him, and, seizing his harp, he began to box the compass, addressing each of the four winds in turn. However, he was to learn that Gwenhidwy is no respecter of the *awen*. As he sang, 'Wind from the west—', his song was cut short by a tremendous crash. The wind rushed through the hall, putting out the torches and carrying with it part of the wall of the building, so that, through the chasm, the terrified revellers could see the white raging of the breakers. Then, 'reeling like an Indian from the wine-rolling Hydaspes',[3] in staggered Seithenyn ap Seithyn. In Peacock's admirable phrase, he 'perceived that there was an innovation'. Furiously flourishing his sword, he demanded, 'show me the enemy', and leapt into the torrent.

Like Sherlock Holmes, Seithenyn is too good to lose, and he makes a remarkable reappearance later in the story. The chapter ends with everyone taking the path into the hills, the tiresome old

bard (Southey again?) holding things up by insisting on bringing his harp with him. At King Gwythno's castle, the homeless lowlanders were provided with a good breakfast. This was made possible by the fact that a number of cattle had also come up into the hills, with the foolish idea of their own self-preservation. Then Teithrin was sent to ask for help from Uther Pendragon at Caer Lleon. He took with him the old harper, who evidently found a job at one of the minor courts on the way, and is not heard of again. Teithrin returned with the gift from Merlin of a magic hamper, which 'multiplied an hundredfold by morning whatever was put into it overnight'. Practical matters thus satisfactorily settled, Gwythno composed suitable laments for the occasion. Peacock concludes this first part of his story by noting that, in his own time, parts of the old rampart could be seen at low water far out in Cardigan Bay, as 'Sarn Badrig, or St Patrick's Causeway'.

The next chapter of the book is introduced by lines from Coleridge's *Kubla Khan:*

> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread;
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drank the milk of paradise.

This is the chapter which tells of the discovery of the infant Taliesin. Prince Elphin, now married to Angharad, had built a salmon-weir on the Mawddach. One fine July night, Angharad, 'soon after the turn of midnight, when dreams are true', roused Elphin saying that she had just dreamt of a miraculous draught of fish. Elphin's fishery had for some time been unproductive, so he quickly went to the weir with Angharad. But if any fish had been there, they were gone; for into the weir had floated a coracle, which had held the weir gates open.

> 'In the coracle lay a sleeping child, clothed in splendid apparel. Angharad took it in her arms. The child opened its eyes, and stretched its little arms towards her with a smile; and she uttered, in delight and wonder at its surpassing beauty, the exclamation of "Taliesin!" "Radiant brow!".'

Peacock told Sir Edward Strachey that he had asked learned Welsh authorities for the true story of Taliesin's birth. Unwilling to confess their ignorance, they had mostly excused themselves by saying that the story was too long to tell. One version, that given in the *Mabinogion*, is sung by Taliesin himself towards the end of the novel. The next chapter is concerned with Taliesin's upbringing and education at the hands of King Gwythno, who 'instructed him in all the knowledge of the age, which was of course not much, in comparison with ours'. For instance:

> 'The science of political economy was sleeping in the womb of time. The advantage of growing rich by getting into debt and paying interest was altogether unknown. . .
>
> 'In physical science, they supplied the place of knowledge by converting conjectures into dogmas; and art which is not yet lost. . . .'

There were also among them 'personages who were worthy to have founded the Society for the Suppression of Vice':

> 'It is recorded, in the Triads, that "Gwrgi Garwlwyd killed a male and female of the Cymry daily, and devoured them; and, on the Saturday, he killed two of each, that he might not kill on the Sunday".'

Sometimes Taliesin left Elphin's dwelling for the 'recesses of Eryri' (Snowdon), where he was initiated into the mysteries of the Druids. This, says Peacock, is evident from several of his poems:

> 'One of them, a shade less obscure than its companions, unquestionably adumbrates the Druidical doctrine of transmigration. According to this poem, Taliesin had been with the cherubim at the fall of Lucifer, in Paradise at the fall of man, and with Alexander at the fall of Babylon; in the ark with Noah, and in the milky-way with Tetragrammaton . . . .'[4]

As a Bardd Braint, or Bard of Presidency, Gwythno had full power to make his pupil an Ovydd or Ovate. Angharad prepared the green robe for Taliesin's investiture, and afterwards he acquired the white robe of the Druids of Eryri.

The story now moves on to Taliesin's manhood. Uther Pendragon and Gwythno had both gone the way of all flesh. In Caer Lleon, Arthur reigned as king of the kings of Britain. Elphin and Angharad had a beautiful daughter, Melanghel; but a neighbouring king, Maelgon Gwyneth, 'a mighty hunter', and a mighty rogue, decided to pay a visit to Elphin's kingdom. Angharad and Melanghel, forewarned by the restlessness of the mountain-goats, went into hiding before his arrival, but when Elphin returned from a day's hunting, he found Maelgon 'making fearful havoc among the family's winter provision'. Learning Elphin's name and quality, Maelgon felt bound to offer his own hospitality in return. In other words, he was taken prisoner and carried off.

'Impressed into royal favour' at Maelgon's Castle of Diganwy, on the Conway, Elphin made the mistake of arguing with his host about the comparative chastity of their respective queens. Maelgon attempted to prove his point by sending his son, Rhûn, to seduce Angharad, but a loyal retainer assumed Angharad's place and 'gave him a supper and everything else he asked for'. Maelgon then carried the argument a stage further by locking Elphin up within four stone walls, 'till he pronounced a more orthodox opinion on the question in dispute'. As a Bardic Triad states: 'Three things that will always swallow and never be satisfied: the sea; a burial ground; and a king.'

Taliesin, now in love with the Princess Melanghel, set out to rescue her father, first giving her a kiss which, we are told, 'is celebrated in an unedited Triad as one of the "Three Chaste Kisses of Britain".' His first move was to appear at the court of King Maelgon in the guise of a wandering minstrel. In a 'Song of the Wind', he attempted to impress on him his danger from King Arthur in Caer Lleon. 'The spider', he warns him, 'sleeps not in his shield.'[5] Unheeded, and saved only by his Bardic inviolability from sharing a cell with Elphin, he returned to Caredigion, where he managed to even the score by luring Rhûn, sent on another mission of royal seduction, into a cave, sealing it with a 'ponderous stone' which, he swore, only Elphin's hand should raise. Also on the missing list by this time was King Arthur's Queen Gwenyvar, who was presumably the captive of some other marauding king as yet unidentified.

To break the triple deadlock, Taliesin set out for the court of King Arthur. On the way, he stopped at the castle of Dinas Vawr, on the Towy. This he found to be in the hands of another royal marauder, King Melvas, from the eastern shores of the Severn. As he entered, the warriors were singing what Peacock justifiably puts forward as '. . . the quintessence of all the war-songs that ever were written, and the sum and substance of all the appetencies, tendencies, and consequences of military glory'. This is his famous 'War-Song of Dinas Vawr'.

The mountain sheep are sweeter,
But the valley sheep are fatter;
We therefore deemed it meeter
To carry off the latter.
We made an expedition;
We met a host, and quelled it;
We forced a strong position,
And killed the men who held it.

On Dyfed's richest valley,
Where herds of kine were brousing,
We made a midnight sally,
To furnish our carousing.
Fierce warriors rushed to meet us;
We met them, and o'erthrew them:
They struggled hard to beat us,
But we conquered them, and slew them.

As we drove our prize at leisure,
The king marched forth to catch us:
His rage surpassed all measure,
But his people could not match us.
He fled to his hall-pillars;
And, ere our force we led off,
Some sacked his house and cellars,
And other cut his head off.

We there, in strife bewild'ring,
Spilt blood enough to swim in:

We orphaned many children,
And widowed many women.
The eagles and the ravens
We glutted with our foeman:
The heroes and the cravens,
The spearmen and the bowmen.

We brought away from battle,
And much their land bemoaned them,
Two thousand head of cattle,
And the head of him who owned them:
Ednyfed, king fo Dyfed,
His head was borne before us;
His wine and beasts supplied our feasts,
And his overthrow, our chorus.

Later that night, Taliesin noticed 'a portly and somewhat elderly personage, of an aspect that would have been venerable, if it had been less rubicund and Bacchic'. This personage announced himself to be Prince Seithenyn, who, when he jumped into the sea, had been saved by the wine-barrels floating out of the cellar by dozens. Somehow he had got his arms round two empty barrels, which by good fortune had had the bungs put into them, to keep them sweet. It also kept them buoyant, and by this means he had floated down with the tide till fishermen had picked him up off the coast of Dyfed. Struck by his deportment, King Melvas had made him his chief butler. Seithenyn ended his story by confiding to Taliesin that Queen Gwenyvar was Melvas's prisoner.

The next chapter describes Taliesin's arrival at King Arthur's court. The city of Caer Lleon, with its ships, its castles, its palaces with gilded roofs, its Roman temples and Christian churches, its theatre and amphitheatre, is evocatively described; but, characteristically, we are also reminded of some of the seamier moments in its subsequent history, as when one of the first Protestant bishops, by name Barlow, having an extravagant lady, '. . . first raised the wind by selling off the lead from the roof of his palace, and then obtained permission to remove from it, on the plea that it was not watertight.'

Hearing Taliesin's news, King Arthur began preparations to rescue his Queen, but King Melvas shifted his quarters beyond the Severn to the isle of Avallon. Unable to follow him because of the winter floods, Arthur resigned himself to a merry Christmas in Caer Lleon. Unbelievably, Peacock ends a brilliant chapter by managing to bring in the Scots:

> 'Caer Lleon was the merriest of places, and was commonly known by the name of Merry Caer Lleon; which the English ballad-makers, for the sake of the smoother sound, and confounding Cambria with Cumbria, most ignorantly or audaciously turned into Merry Carlisle; thereby emboldening a northern antiquary to set about proving that King Arthur was a Scotchman. . . .'

Chartering a small fishing-boat, Taliesin made his way to Avallon, which is Glastonbury. Its name, Ynys Avallon, 'the island of apples', is, says Peacock, easily explained: 'The brethren of Avallon were the apples of the church. It was the oldest monastic establishment in Britain; and consequently, as of reason, the most plump, succulent and rosy.'

Admitted to the abbot, Taliesin found that Seithenyn had somehow preceded him. The next part of the book concerns their joint efforts to persuade the abbot to reason with King Melvas—Seithenyn's contribution being to present him with a rare wine from Caer Lleon:

> 'Take a little more. . . . That is the true quantity. Wine is my medicine; and my quantity is a little more. . . . Screw yourself up to another goblet. . . . Wine from gold has a sort of double light, that illuminates a dark path miraculously. . . .'

Eventually the abbot was persuaded to face King Melvas, and, after some tough talk, it was agreed that Queen Gwenyvar should be returned to Caer Lleon. At a grand Bardic Congress held in the Roman theatre, presided over by King Arthur, Taliesin, with a song about his mystic birth, was awarded the palm over the heads of Prince Llyarch, Merlin, Aneurin, and the other principal bards of Britain. Only one incident marred this happy finale:

'King Arthur had not long returned to his hall, when Gwenyvar arrived, escorted by the Abbot of Avallon and Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi. . . . Seithenyn assured King Arthur . . . that the queen returned as pure as the day on which King Melvas had carried her off.

"None here will doubt that", said Gwenvach, the wife of Modred. Gwenyvar was not pleased with the compliment, and, almost before she had saluted King Arthur she turned suddenly round and slapped Gwenvach on the face. . . . This slap is recorded in the Bardic Triads as one of the Three Fatal Slaps of the Island of Britain.'

It led, says Peacock, to that enmity between Arthur and Modred which 'terminated in the battle of Camlan, wherein all the flower of Britain perished on both sides'. But that, he also says, lies beyond the scope of 'the present veridicous narrative', which ends happily enough. Arthur decreed that Taliesin and Melanghel should have the most splendid wedding ever seen in Caer Lleon, and, as an afterthought, ordered that King Maelgon should pay for it. Seithenyn became second butler to King Arthur. Taliesin was made Chief of the Bards of Britain, and, in the ripeness of time, the kingdom of Caredigion passed into the hands of Avaon, his son by Melanghel.

Modern criticism of *The Misfortunes of Elphin* has mostly concentrated on the character of Prince Seithenyn. David Garnett calls him 'one of the immortal drunkards in the literature of the world'. J. B. Priestley writes as panegyrically of him in his book on Peacock, and has also devoted a chapter to him in his *English Comic Characters*. Certainly the gargantuan Seithenyn has a grotesque charm, but too much attention to him has the danger of distorting the balance of Peacock's novel as a whole. Seithenyn without Taliesin would be Caliban without Ariel. Each gives point to the other. And between them, as between earth and sky, stands the human-sized Elphin, who has no power over events, but is buffeted by them. There is a triangle here which is as basic to Welsh folklore as the Bardic Triads.[6] To take Seithenyn out of context is a disservice to Peacock and to his novel.

When it appeared, the *Cambrian Quarterly* described it as 'the most entertaining book, if not the best, that has yet been published on the ancient customs and traditions of Wales'.[7] The *Westminster* would have liked the book better without its admixture of satire: 'It is not for the genuine satirist, either directly or indirectly, to insinuate the superiority of half-barbaric states of existence, by partially adverting to the evils consequent on the higher states of civilization'. One may fairly ask, 'Why not?' The satire adds a spice which, for many people, makes Peacock's historical romances more readable today than, say, the Waverley Novels. Carl Dawson says that *The Misfortunes of Elphin* is a book to be rewritten for each generation. He quotes T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* as a contemporary example.[8]

Peacock told Edith Nicolls that the book was simply a frame for the songs. Perhaps it started that way, but the time taken over it, and the amount of research involved, show that it became more than that. It developed slowly, because of his work in London, but also because there was no hurry. Secure at East India House, he could now write what, and when, he chose. It kept him close to his wife, and was obviously written *con amore*; and he told Sir Edward Strachey that he was proud that Welsh archaeologists treated it as a serious and valuable addition to Welsh history.

Chapter Sixteen

WORDS AND MUSIC

In spite of Peacock's demolition of Thomas Moore's *Epicurean* in 1826, Sir John Bowring, editor of the *Westminster Review*, sent him another book by Moore for his critical attention. This was the first part of Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, which appeared in January 1830. While preparing his review, Peacock sent a questionnaire to Byron's friend and executor, Sir John Cam Hobhouse, and received, via Sir John Bowring, a courteous reply:

> 'On the whole I do not see how I can be of use to your Reviewer who, I have no doubt, will, from the great talents he has already shown, require no other aid than his own good sense and fine taste will amply afford.
>
> 'If I should see Mr Mill at the India House I shall be very happy to have the honour of being introduced to Mr Peacock.'

Nine years later, when East India House affairs brought the two men together again, they appear still to have been comparative strangers. But after that Hobhouse, as Lord Broughton, was to be one of Peacock's few close friends for the rest of his life.[1]

Peacock begins with some general observations. In his last years, Byron was '. . . Living out of society and much talked of in it, and haunted in his retirement by varieties of the small Boswell or eavesdropping genus'. Amongst these he includes Thomas Medwin (the man who had called *Rhododaphne* 'Rhododendron') and Leigh Hunt:

> 'We did not review Mr Hunt's publication. The *Quarterly Review* did it ample justice. The querulous egotisms, the scaturient vanity bubbling up in every page like the hundred fountains of the river

Hoangho, the readiness to violate all the confidences of private life, the intrinsic nothingness of what the writer had it in his power to tell . . . presented so many inviting prominences to the hand of castigation, that the *Quarterly* could for once come forth on fair ground, and flagellate an opponent without having recourse to its old art of wilful misinterpretation.'

Turning now to the book he has been asked to review, Peacock begins by shooting once more at the easy target of Moore's loose writing. Then he comes to the point. Byron set out to mystify people, and Moore, like his fellow eavesdroppers, has been taken in: he has allowed himself to be mystified. As an instance, he takes Moore's account of Byron's early passion for Mrs Chaworth. And here, writing ostensibly about Byron, Peacock might be writing about himself:

'Through life he aimed at what he could not compass. He took the best substitutes which circumstances placed in his way, and consoled himself with a handmaid for the loss of a Helen: the latter still being longed for because she was inaccessible.'

Later in his review, Peacock comes to Moore's treatment of Byron's lines, *Written beneath the picture of—*

'Tis said with sorrow time can cope,
But this I feel can ne'er be true,
For, by the death-blow of my hope,
My memory immortal grew.

Dismissing Moore's 'most contorted interpretation' of this (that Byron had thus laid up an immortal memory for himself), he comes to what he sees as its true meaning, and, once again he writes as if from personal experience:

'By the death-blow of my hope—the blow that deprived me of the original of this picture—my memory grew immortal:—my remembrance of her became so strong that it shews not the slightest symptom of decay; now, when after a lapse of time I look at her picture, the painful feelings of memory are as painful as on the day I lost her.'

Moore's book is dismissed as 'a production little instructive to the reader, little creditable to the author, little honourable to its subject'. It was, however, only the first of two parts, and Peacock said he would suspend final judgement until the second part appeared. But Moore protested so violently to Sir John Bowring that the second part was not offered to the *Westminster* for review, so that what would surely have been one of Peacock's most interesting critical essays was never written.[2]

Two more articles by Peacock appeared in the *Westminster* of October 1830. Each had its surprises. One was a notice of the *Memoirs, Correspondence and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson, late President of the United States of America*. It is pitched in an unexpected key of high praise: 'This is one of the most important publications ever presented to the world. In the catalogue of the benefactors of mankind, few deserve so high a place as Thomas Jefferson.'

This is very different from Dr Opimian's jibes at all things American in *Gryll Grange*; but it is important to remember the thirty years between. In the early 1830s Peacock was not the only one to look to North America as a country where there were still untarnished ideals, and in Thomas Jefferson he saw a statesman whose party was, he felt, perhaps the first instance of one which had carried through in power the promises it had proffered in opposition. Jefferson was a disciple of Locke, and an admirer of ancient Athens. He also held views which Peacock notes with obvious satisfaction. For instance, he fought against '. . . an inheritance of eternal taxes, which will bring our government and people into the condition of those of England, a nation of pikes and gudgeons, the little bird merely as food for the former'. He had a humility which Peacock saw as 'strikingly at variance with politics at home', and he shared Peacock's distrust of modern methods of finance:

> 'I sincerely believe . . . that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.'

Peacock ends by describing Jefferson as: '. . . Undoubtedly the greatest public benefactor that has yet appeared in the nineteenth century, whatever may be his station in the eighteenth, in which it was difficult to say that he was second, even to Washington'.

The second article, in the October number of the *Westminster Review*, was about the plans to rebuild the old London Bridge. At first sight, Peacock appears to be taking the same *laissez-faire* attitude as Seithenyn in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*.

> 'The old London Bridge was begun in 1176, and finished in 1209. It was built on such unscientific principles that it ought to have been carried away before it was finished, when it was finished, and at any given time subsequently; but partly by the awkward contrivance of barbarous men, partly by its own obstinacy, it has stood six centuries and a quarter. . . .'

But this is not just a sentimental stand against reform: it is a protest against corruption and jobbery. Peacock produces specific calculations to show that the removal of the dam of the old bridge would flood half of London: 'Logs of mahogany will swim about Bankside; kitchen fires will be extinguished in Lambeth: cabbages will be submerged, and melon-frames floated off at Millbank'.

This threat to the safety of London and its citizens was for the profit of the corrupt few:

> 'The whole affair is an instructive specimen of the way in which public business is done, and public money expended. Evidence is collected and conclusions are drawn in the teeth of it. . . . Plans are collected, and it had been pre-determined whose plan shall be adopted. Tenders are called for and the contractors have already been chosen . . . in order to put a few thousands into the pockets of favoured individuals.'

And if the dam, after all, has to be restored, who will be responsible? No one. He has not, he points out, touched on the question of sentiment. But, even on this ground, he deplores the sweeping changes which '. . . give to the metropolis the appearance of a thing of yesterday, and obliterate every visible sign that connects the present generation with the ages that are gone'.

Carl Dawson poses an interesting question: what would Peacock have said when the new London Bridge which he opposed was transplanted brick by brick to the United States? I think I know the answer to that one. He would have said: 'Good riddance!'

We come now to a most interesting and sometimes neglected side of Peacock—his musical criticism. The first notices that bear his signature date from 1830, but he was evidently at work before that. On 19 July 1829, Hazlitt, in the *Atlas*, made an attack on the Utilitarians, who, he said, 'are seized with the same *hydrophobia* of music, painting and poetry as their pious predecessors'. He instanced the sermons of the Reverend Edward Irving, and the repressive policy of that Utilitarian organ, the *Westminster Review*: 'Will Mr Irving let you go to Covent garden or Drury Lane? No more will the *Westminster*! P— poor fellow! dare no more show his face there than his own Sir Ourang-Outang!'

Hazlitt also suggests that Peacock is too indiscriminate in his praise of his favourite artistes. However, his signed notices give plenty of evidence of the sharp critical attitude one might expect. They appeared, not in the *Westminster*, but in Coulson's *Globe and Traveller*, and afterwards in the *Examiner*, when it was taken over by Albany Fonblanque.[3] For instance:

> 'Signor Arnaud, while a tempest of paternal rage was a-bursting on the head of his mistress, stood, with a face empty of all meaning, twiddling his thumbs, on the outskirts of the party, presenting no earthly image but that of a hovering tailor watching for an opportunity to take measure of one of the old gentlemen.' (8 April 1832)

Or of Madame Puzzi:

> 'She certainly moves our feelings, but in the wrong direction: the part suffers, instead of the heroine.' (18 March 1832)

No one is sacred, not even the great Costa, whose 'philatto-thratto-philatto-thrat' as he beat the desk with his baton suggested to Peacock on one occasion that the notes were likely to fly out of the score into the air. Nor does he spare his fellow-critics: '*The Times* has are faculties of seeing and hearing. It contrived on

Thursday night to see the whole of Rossini's *Tancredi* though only the first act was performed.' (7 February 1833)

His particular love, as we know, was the Italian opera, the home of which was the King's Theatre. At its best, he saw it as possessing the purity of the ancient Greek theatre. He once wrote of a performance of Bellini's *Semiramide*: 'It came upon us as a shadow of the Athenian stage.' (7 August 1831)

But no Italian composer, not even Rossini, could hold a candle to Mozart:

> 'There is nothing perfect in the world except Mozart's music. Criticism has nothing to do with it, but to admire. Whatever is is right . . . Mozart cannot even be disparaged in comparison with himself—the detractor cannot say "How inferior this thing is to that!" for every composition seems to have a peculiar appropriateness to the occasion, and it is impossible to conceive anything more suitable. There is nothing of mannerism in Mozart's music, yet it cannot be mistaken for any other, or any other for it—it is peculiar in its excellence.' (6 February 1832)

Unhappily, one of the imperfections in this world was the standard of performance, particularly at the King's Theatre under the management of Monck Mason: 'Our patience is exhausted with seeing all our old favourite operas seized upon by this Mohawk management, and subjected, one after another, to the scalping-knife and the tomahawk.' (29 July 1832)

On one occasion, the first act of Rossini's *Semiramide* was followed by the second act of Bellini's *Il Pirato*, which provoked Peacock to misquote Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*:

> A damsel with a fish's tail
> In a vision once I saw.

It was, he added, the muse of the King's Theatre. 'Under no other auspices could such a dramatic monster have been dreamed of'. What he asked for was 'good operas, either new to the stage, or not grown stale by repetition, unmutilated, and effectively performed'. It was the corporate effort that counted, not the individuals;

and, on one occasion at least, he found more to praise in the German opera than in the Italian:

> '*Der Freischutz* is in truth the first performance this year, that has really been given as a drama. . . . Here is a perfect company, without anything that in the theatrical parlance is called a star. Here is an admirable opera, well performed in all its parts; and the crowded audiences which attend it may teach the manager, that this is the sort of performance to draw the public to its doors, and not a paltry *imbroglio*, jumbled together without any semblance of design, but that of showing off individuals.' (20 May 1832)

Selfish or indulgent performances were one bugbear; another was incompetent or shoe-string stage-presentation:

> 'The carrying-off of *Don Juan* was managed by the same identical red-and-yellow gauze-winged devilry, which we described last week in our account of *Macbeth*. The machinists, having got it up, could not get it down, till, after many ineffectual efforts, it was forced crashing through the traps, damaged, we hope, beyond repair.' (5 July 1832)

Sometimes the designer, or whoever did the costumes, could distort the performance, with '. . . volumes of muslin drawers, which set forth the shadowy semblance of something like a Dutch farmer's wife skating to market in a high wind'. (27 February 1831.) If it came to that, the audience was sometimes in competition, with '. . . those walls of gauze, lace, silk, velvet or plumage, which some women, with selfish disregard for the comfort of others, are in the habit of building on their heads, to say nothing of an occasional square foot of tortoise-shell, professing to be the top of a comb. . . . It is curious and true . . . that the volume of the head-dress increases in mathematical proportion to the ugliness of the wearer.' (22 May 1841)

Opinions differ about Peacock's musical criticism. Van Doren dismisses it as unimportant, Howard Mills regards it as his most vital work after the departure of Shelley. He thought enough of it himself to keep together a bundle of clippings, found after his

death. He gives us a detailed description of the opera house of his time, and he was present on great occasions:

> 'Paganini draws forth from his instrument notes and combinations which (in the modern world) none before him have produced or dreamed of: wild and wonderfully alike in the strongest bursts of power, and in the softest and sweetest touches, sir—drawn and evanescent as the voices of distant birds. . . . The real magic is not the novelty of the feat, but the surpassing beauty of the effect. . . . The perception of surpassing beauty would remain, if that of rarity and strangeness were withdrawn.' (12 June 1831)

Another memorable occasion was a performance of *Fidelio*:

> 'Beethoven's *Fidelio* is the absolute perfection of dramatic music. It combines the profoundest harmony with melody that speaks to the soul. . . . *Fidelio* is, we believe, Beethoven's only opera. It is the sun among the stars. It is not a step in the progress of dramatic music. It is a clear projection of it, a century in advance of its march.' (27 May 1832)[5]

Peacock's later writings on music must wait till another chapter, since they would take us too far into the 1830s. The point to consider now is the effect of his extreme musical sensitivity on his style. In 'Musical Glasses of Peacock',[6] Edmund Wilson wrote:

> 'You get closer to what Peacock is trying to do by approaching him through his admiration of Mozart than by assimilating him to Lucian or Voltaire. His books are more like operas than novels and the elements of fantasy with which they play as well as landscapes, boating and skating parties are as important as the conversations. It all makes a delicious music at the same time sober and gay, in which words fall like notes from a flute.'

In an article printed in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* for July 1955, Paulina June Salz of the University of Southern California explores the subject further:

> '. . . Many critics have puzzled over Peacock's style and compared it to old dry wine; sparkling, dry, light, and strong; have remarked

about its clarity and simplicity, stripped of everything irrelevant or redundant, yet capable of anything Peacock wished it to do without the slightest strain of forcing.

'. . . It is my contention that Peacock was trying to write prose in a manner that is similar to the way in which music is written; and was carrying on an experiment in tone and rhythm that many modern writers have carried further beyond the ordinary realms of syntax; and that the model for this style was primarily Mozartian.

Here Miss Salz points out that Mozart had a similar appeal to another great satirist and verbal stylist, Bernard Shaw, who in his Preface to *Man and Superman* called him 'the master beloved of the masters'. She adds:

'When one reads Peacock aloud one soon notices that the style is tuned to the cadence of the human voice rather than to the sweep of the eye, which accounts for so much of its balance and variations of rhythm and tone. Wilson thought of flute music in connection with the qualities of clarity and purity of tone in Peacock's style, but the roundness and fullness of the style evoke the sound of the French horn as well. Both the flute and the French horn were, with the oboe, Mozart's favourites as best for cleanness of phrasing and precision and balance.'[7]

This musical quality is more evident even than before in the novel to which we now turn. Just as the lilt of old Captain Love's shanties can be heard in the effortless glees and drinking songs, so, in some way, the clean strong rhythms of Mozart, Rossini, and Bellini have found their way into the writing of *Crotchet Castle.*

Chapter Seventeen

CROTCHET CASTLE

Published in 1831, *Crotchet Castle*, with its gathering of amiable eccentrics, has close affinities with the first novel, *Headlong Hall.* But in the years between the world had changed. Old fears had become realities. Incendiary gangs were roaming the countryside in protest against the harsh conditions of agricultural labour.[1] Another new menace, in Peacock's eyes, was the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge', founded by his *bête-noire*, Lord Brougham.[2]

A further sign of the passage of time since *Headlong Hall* is the character of the new host. Mr Crotchet is a parvenu squire, who has made his money in the City during the Napoleonic Wars.

> 'Ebenezer MacCrotchet, Esquire, was the London-born offspring of a worthy native of the "north countrie" who had walked up to London on a commercial adventure, with all his surplus capital, not very neatly tied up in a not very clean handkerchief, suspended over his shoulder from the end of a hooked stick, extracted from the first hedge on his pilgrimage.'

Crotchet *père*, having 'worked himself a step or two up the ladder of life', had married the daughter of 'a highly respectable merchant of Duke's Place'—hence his son's name of Ebenezer.

> 'Mr MacCrotchet had derived from his mother the instinct, and from his father the rational principle, of enriching himself at the expense of the rest of mankind, by all the recognized modes of accumulation on the windy side of the law.'

He had then been advised by his friend, Mr Ramsbottom, the zodiacal mythologist (a brief reappearance of Mr J. F. Newton)

to '... withdraw from the region of Uranus or Brahma, the maker, to that of Saturn of Veeshnu, the preserver ...'. In other words, to get out while the going was good. Mr Crotchet had therefore acquired a fine villa on the banks of the Thames. He had also acquired 'an English Christian wife', and 'having none of the Scotch accent, was ungracious enough to be ashamed of his blood'. By signing himself E. M. Crotchet, he had gradually foisted on his neighbours the impression that his names were Edward Matthew. 'The more effectually to sink the Mac', he had christened his villa Crotchet Castle, and had obtained a coat of arms:

> 'Crest, a crotchet rampant, in A sharp; Arms, three empty bladders, turgescent, to show how opinions are formed; three bags of gold, pendent, to show how they are maintained; three naked swords, tranchant, to show how they are administered; and three barbers' blocks, gaspant, to show how they are swallowed.'

Mr Crotchet was left a widower, with two children. One of these, after bearing off the highest academical honours from Oxford, had trodden in his father's footsteps, and had become a junior partner in 'the eminent loan-jobbing firm of Catchflat and Company':

> 'Here, in the days of paper prosperity, he applied his science-illumined genius to the blowing of bubbles, the bursting of which sent many a poor devil to the jail, the workhouse, or the bottom of the river, but left young Crotchet rolling in riches.
>
> 'These riches he had been on the point of doubling, by a marriage with the daughter of Mr. Touchandgo, the great banker, when, one foggy morning, Mr. Touchandgo and the contents of his till were suddenly reported absent; and as the fortune which the young gentleman had intended to marry was not forthcoming, this tender affair of the heart was nipped in the bud.'[3]

The other child was a daughter, Lemma (meaning gain or profit), who, 'for the vallies of the Thames', was 'perhaps a little too much to the taste of Solomon'. But:

> 'She was also a glittering bait to divers young squires expectant (whose fathers were too well acquainted with the occult sig-

nification of mortgage), and even to one or two sprigs of the nobility, who thought that the lining of a civic purse would superinduce a very passable factitious nap upon a threadbare title.'

The mood mellows with the introduction of the neighbouring vicar, the Reverend Doctor Folliott, 'a gentleman endowed with a tolerable stock of learning, an interminable swallow, and an indefatigable pair of lungs'.[4] At the beginning of chapter two, this divine sets the action moving with considerable *brio*:

'"God bless my soul, sir!" exclaimed the Reverend Doctor Folliott, bursting, one fine May morning, into the breakfast-room at Crotchet Castle, "I am out of all patience with this march of mind. Here has my house been nearly burned down, by my cook taking it into her head to study hydrostatics, in a sixpenny tract, published by the Steam Intellect Society, and written by a learned friend who is for doing all the world's business as well as his own, and is equally well qualified to handle every branch of human knowledge. I have a great abomination of this learned friend. . . . My cook must read his rubbish in bed; and as might naturally be expected, she dropped suddenly fast asleep, over-turned the candle, and set the curtains in a blaze. Luckily, the footman went into the room at the moment, in time to tear down the curtains and throw them into the chimney, and a pitcher of water on her nightcap extinguished her wick: she is a greasy subject, and would have burned like a short mould.'

Only when Folliott has 'exhaled his grievance' does he observe that there are visitors at the table, brought by young Crotchet from London. He is introduced go 'Mr MacQuedy, the economist; Mr Skionar, the transcendental poet; and Lord Bossnowl, sone of the Earl of Foolincourt, and member for the borough of Rogue-ingrain'. Footnotes tell us that MacQuedy is 'Quasi Mac QUE, son of a demonstration', and Mr Skionar is, Peacock tells us, *ΣΚΙ'ᾶς Ο'ΝΑΡ*, Ombrae somnium' (the dream of a shade).[5]

The conversation starts amiably enough with Folliott complimenting his host on 'the array of his breakfast table'; but soon

he bridles at the claim of the Scots to be the 'modern Athenians': 'Athenians indeed! Where is your theatre? Who among you has written a comedy? Where is you attic salt?'

All Mr MacQuedy can quote, on the spur of the moment, is '*The Gentle Shepherd* of the divine Allan Ramsay'; which brings down upon him the retort by Folliott: '*The Gentle Shepherd!* It is just as much a comedy as the book of Job'.

At the end of the chapter, Folliott again scores points over the Scotsman:

MR MACQUEDY: 'Laughter is an involuntary action of certain muscles, developed in the human species by the progress of civilization. The savage never laughs.'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'No sir, he has nothing to laugh at. Give him Modern Athens, the "learned friend" and the Steam Intellect Society. They will develop his muscles.'

After breakfast, Folliott, on his way home, finds a young gentleman in the grounds, making a sketch of the Roman camp, who asks him if he is to understand that the place is his property. Folliott replies that it is not, and the more the pity; but that the owner is a good friend of his, and 'a highly respectable gentleman'.

THE STRANGER: 'Good and respectable, sir, I take it, mean rich?'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'That is their meaning, sir.'

THE STRANGER: 'I understand the owner to be a Mr. Crotchet. He has a handsome daughter, I am told.'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'He has, sir. . . .'

THE STRANGER: '. . . There is a son, too, I believe, sir, a great and successful blower of bubbles.'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'A hero, sir, in his line. Never did angler in September hook more gudgeons.'

THE STRANGER: 'To say the truth, two very amiable young people, with whom I have had some little acquaintance, Lord Bossnowl, and his sister, Lady Clarinda, are reported to be on the point of concluding a double marriage with Miss Crotchet and her brother, by way of putting a new varnish on the old nobility. Lord Fool-

incourt, their father, is terribly poor for a lord who owns a borough.'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'Well, sir, the Crotchets have plenty of money, and the old gentleman's weak point is a handkering after high blood. I saw your acquaintance Lord Bossnowl this morning, but I did not see his sister. She may be there, nevertheless, and doing fashionable justice to this fine May morning, by lying in bed till noon.'

Her entrance thus suitably prepared, Lady Clarinda arrives with her brother and Miss Crotchet. Lady Clarinda is beautiful, cultured, and witty, and, as we soon learn, the stranger, now identified as Captain Fitzchrome, is madly in love with her. But, as she coquettishly makes clear to him while they walk back to Crotchet Castle, he is a mere half-pay officer, and in no position to support her in the style of luxury which she considers essential. In vain he protests that his poverty is only comparative.

CAPTAIN FITZCHROME: '. . . Many decent families are maintained on smaller means.'

LADY CLARINDA: 'Decent families: aye, decent is the distinction from respectable. Respectable means rich, and decent means poor.'

No, she needs 'large rooms and large looking-glasses, and a fine large butler, with a tinge of smooth red in his face'. She thinks 'an opera box a very substantial comfort, and a carriage'. She has made up her mind 'not to give away her hearr when she can sell it . . .'. The Captain accepts the invitation of Miss Crotchet to join the house-party, and goes to dress 'full of misgivings as to the extent of belief that he was bound to accord to the words of the lady of his heart'.

At dinner, Captain Fitzchrome secures a seat next to Lady Clarinda, in spite of her artfully arranging last-minute encounters for him with MacQuedy and Skionar. 'Well, Captain', she admits, 'I see you can still manoeuvre.' She then proceeds to point out to him the other guests, so that we get, as it were, a long continuous panning shot round the table of a fine assembly of eccentrics, with Lady Clarinda's sly comments as each comes into view. She starts

with their host, 'a good tempered, half-informed person', fond of people that 'talk nonsense logically'. On his left is her brother; then Miss Crotchet, 'my sister-in-law', she reminds the Captain, 'that is to be'; then Mr Firedamp, 'a very absurd person, who thinks that water is the evil principle'; then Mr Evesdrop, 'a sort of bookseller's tool', who 'coins all his acquaintances in reminiscences and sketches of character'.[6] Next to him, Mr Henbane, the toxicologist, who has passed half his life in studying poisons and antidotes: 'The first thing he did on his arrival here was to kill the cat; and while Miss Crotchet was crying over her, he brought her to life again'. Next to Mr Henbane sits Mr MacQuedy, who 'lays down the law about everything, and therefore may be taken to understand everything'. Then Mr Skionar, 'a sort of poetical philosopher', who 'always dreams with his eyes open, or with one eye at any rate, which is an eye to his gain'. Next comes Mr Chainmail, a 'good-looking young gentleman' who is 'deep in monkish literature', and 'laments bitterly over the inventions of gunpowder, steam, and gas, which he says have ruined the world'.[7] Next to him is Mr Toogood, the co-operationist, who '. . . wants to parcel out the world into squares like a chess-board, with a community on dach, raising every thing for one another, with a great steam-engine to serve them in common for tailor and hosier, kitchen and cook'.[8]

Then comes young Crotchet, whom, she reminds the Captain, she is to marry, to please her father. Next to him, the 'dillettante composer, Mr Trillo': 'They say his name was O'Trill, and he has taken the O from the beginning and put it at the end'.

Next, Dr Morbific, who has inoculated himself against every kind of pestilence, to prove that there is no such thing as contagion: 'a walking phial of wrath, corked full of all infections', Then Mr Philpot the geographer, who 'lays down the streams of Terra Incognita as accurately as if he had been there'[9] and next to him 'Sir Simon Steeltrap, of Steeltrap Lodge, Member for Crouching-Curtown, Justice of Peace for the County, and Lord of the United Manors of Springgun and Treadmill', who has 'enclosed commons and woodlands; abolished cottage-gardens; . . . convicted one third of the peasantry; suspected the rest; and passed nearly the whole

of them through a wholesome course of prison discipline, which has finished their education at the expense of the county'.

When the ladies have withdrawn, young Crotchet puts up a subject for debate: there is one point, he suggests, in which the philosophers of the world seem to be agreed: they need only money to regenerate the world. Assuming, then, that a large sum of money were available, how would the assembled company dispose of it? Everyone rides off on his own hobbyhorse. Mr Trillo sums it up in a Gilbertian lyric, in which he invited the rest to join:

After careful meditation,
And profound deliberation,
On the various pretty projects which have just been shown,
Not a scheme in agitation,
For the world's amelioration,
Has a grain of commonsense in it, exept my own.

A number of those present refuse to sing this, and Mr Trillo gets more support when he changes his theme:

If I drink water while this doth last,
May I never again drink wine:
For how can a man, in his life of a span,
Do anything better than dine?
We'll dine and drink, and say if we think
That any thing better can be;
And when we have dined, wish all mankind
May dine as well as we.

To quote this as typical of Peacock's own philosophy is to miss the irony that lies behind it: this is the one point upon which his Utopians can agree. As he puts it in the final, laconic sentence of the chapter: 'The schemes for the world's regeneration evaporated in a tumult of voices.'

The next chapter, called 'The Sleeping Venus', is headed by two lines from Samuel Butler:

Quoth he: In all my life till now,
I ne'er saw so profane a show.

An edict had gone forth from the magistrates of London that 'no plaster-of-Paris should appear in the streets without petticoats'. Crotchet's reaction to this encroachment on individual liberty had been to fill his house with nude Venuses of all kinds, 'an unexpected display' which 'very much astonished' the Reverend Doctor Folliott.

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'These little alabaster figures on the mantelpiece, Mr Crotchet, and those large figures in the niches—may I take the liberty to ask you what they are intended to represent?'

MR CROTCHET: Venus, sir; nothing more, sir; just Venus.'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'May I ask you, sir, why they are there?'

MR CROTCHET: 'To be looked at, sir; just to be looked at: the reason for most things being in a gentleman's house at all. . . .'

Folliott's blood-pressure slowly mounts as the argument develops. Crotchet attempts to convince him that the ladies of ancient Athens would have had no scruples about sitting in the nude for the sculptor Praxiteles.

MR CROTCHET: '. . . as you know, sir, very modest women did to Canova: one of whom, an Italian countess, being asked by an English lady, "how she could bear it?" answered, "Very well; there was a good fire in the room".'

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: 'Sir, the English lady should have asked how the Italian lady's husband could bear it. The phials of my wrath would overflow if poor dear Mrs Folliott—'

The scene reaches its climax when Folliott takes the liberty 'to employ, on this occasion, the *argumentum ad hominem*':

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: '. . . Would you have allowed Miss Crotchet to sit for a model to Canova?'

MR CROTCHET. 'Yes, sir.'

'God bless my soul, sir!' exclaimed the Reverend Doctor Folliott, throwing himself back into a chair, and flinging up his heels, with the premeditated design of giving emphasis to his exclamation: but by miscalculating his *impetus*, he overbalanced his chair, and

laid himself on the carpet in a right angle, of which his back was the base.

Two other adventures quickly befall Folliott. On his way home that night, he is attacked by two ruffians, and fights them off manfully with his bamboo cane. He is then called before the visiting Charity Commissioners, who have arrived to investigate an endowment on an almshouse which had long ago become a ruin. Both these incidents have contemporary references. In Edinburgh, Burke and Hare were plying their trade of corpse-snatching, and Folliott saw himself as a possible 'subject for science'. The Charity Commissions were a time-wasting misuse of public money set up by the 'learned friend', Lord Brougham.

But now the key of the book changes. Young Crotchet had organized an expedition:

'Four beautiful cabined pinnaces, one for the ladies one for the gentlemen, one for kitchen and servants, one for a dining-room and band of music, weighed anchor, on a fine July morning, from below Crotchet Castle, and were towed merrily, by strong trotting horses, against the stream of the Thames.'

Peacock does not overlook the satirical opportunities of a stop at Oxford, where 'they walked about to see the curiosities of architecture, painted windows, and undisturbed libraries'. Folliott laid a wager with Crotchet that 'in all their perlustrations they would not find a man reading', and won it. Opimian was also speaking for Peacock when, in the flow of talk that accompanied the excursion, he claimed that Charles Farley, the writer of the Covent Garden pantomimes, was a greater enchanter than that other Enchanter in the North—a bold statement when Sir Walter Scott was at the height of his fame.

Making up for the frustration of the expedition with Shelley, when they had to turn back because they could not afford the canal dues, Peacock takes the party through the locks, and the tunnel under Sapperton Hill, until they moor their pinnaces 'in the Vale of Llangollen by the aqueduct of Pontycysyllty'. It is in these romantic surroundings that Lady Clarinda decided to inform

Captain Fitzchrome that it is not well that they should 'flirt any longer': 'Be satisfied with the assurance that you alone, of all men, have ever broken my rest. To be sure, it was only for about three nights in all; but that is too much'.

The Captain, having '*le coeur navré*', wandered off into the mountains of Merionethshire, 'the land of all that is beautiful in nature, and all that is lovely in woman'. There Chainmail found him at a secluded inn, and, when the Captain was called to London on business, decided to stay on and explore the district. One day, he had traced upwards the course of a mountain stream, and was looking down on that familiar scene of a lake which 'lay like a dark mirror, set in a gigantic frame of mountain precipices'.

> '. . . The faint murmur of the stream he had quitted, the occasional flapping of the wings of a heron, and at long intervals the solitary springing of a trout, were the only sounds that came to his ear. . . . Suddenly he heard the dash of a paddle, and, turning his eyes, saw a solitary and beautiful girl gliding over the lake in a coracle.'

The girl, in rustic attire, landed and disappeared among the rocks. Fascinated, he haunted the spot day after day, but she did not reappear. Then, one day, he saw her, dressed as before, on the wall of a ruined castle by the sea. Susannah Touchandgo, it will be remembered, had retired to North Wales when her father absconded. There she had adopted the dress of a peasant girl—the black hat, the blue gown, the black stockings, the shoes tied with ribbon on the instep. But she had added touches of her own: a black feather, a tippet, a waistband fastened in front with a silver buckle; and 'in this apparel, to which, in winter, she added a scarlet cloak, she made dreadful havoc among the rustic mountaineers'—and now in the heart of Chainmail. When he saw her on the castle wall, he found his way up there, but 'the nymph of the place was gone'. When at last he saw her again, she was resting in a favourite spot, where 'a cataract fell in a single sheet' into a pool:

> 'The pool boiled and bubbled at the base of the fall, but through the greater part of its extent lay calm, deep, and black, as if the cataract had plunged through it to an unimaginable depth without

disturbing its eternal repose. . . . High above, on both sides, the steep woody slopes of the dingle soared into the sky; and from a fissure in the rock, on which the little path terminated, a single gnarled and twisted oak stretched itself over the pool . . .'.[10]

Along the trunk of this oak Miss Susannah Touchandgo lay asleep; and as Chainmail gazed at her, her broad black hat fell into the stream below. Afraid for her safety, Chainmail mounted guard until she awoke. Then, helping her to the bank, he begged permission to escort her home, and they set out together towards the farmhouse of Ap-Llymry, where the lady lived.

Clearly the lady is Jane Gryffydh, and it is interesting to compare the idyllic picture given here with the reserve of Peacock's letters to Hookham. How much was he understating then, and how much is he romanticizing now?[11] A little of both, no doubt, but in Peacock's description of the walk to the farmhouse it is surely impossible not to sense a deeply felt personal experience:

'The lady had lost her hat; and, as she turned towards Mr Chainmail, in speaking to him, there was no envious projection of brim to intercept the beams of those radiant eyes he had been so anxious to see unclosed There was in them a mixture of softness and brilliancy, the perfection of the beauty of female eyes, such as some men have passed through life without seeing, and such as no man ever saw, in any pair of eyes, but once; such as can never be forgotten.'

That night, after dinner, Susannah's harp was brought out by the farmer's children, and at their request she sang 'the ballad from Paer's Camilla: *Un di carco il mulinaro*'. This tells the story of a traveller in the Black Forest, who 'has his nose pinched by his grandmother's ghost'. The children knew every syllable, and at the appropriate moment Chainmail was surprised when a chubby little girl clambered on to his kneees and gave his nose a vigorous tweak.

'Then came a brewage, which the farmer called his nightcap, of which he insisted on Mr Chainmail taking his full share. After which the gentleman remembered nothing, till he awoke, the next morning, to the pleasant consciousness that he was under

the same roof with one of the most fascinating creatures under the canopy of heaven.'

When Captain Fitzchrome returned from London, Chainmail confided to him that he was in love.

CAPTAIN FITZCHROME: 'The plunge must have been very sudden, if you are already over head and ears.'

MR CHAINMAIL: 'As deep as Llyn-y-dreddiadvrawd.'

CAPTAIN FITZCHROME: 'And what may that be?'

MR CHAINMAIL: 'A pool not far off: a resting-place of a mountain stream, which is said to have no bottom.'

Chainmail then recited to him a ballad that told the story of the friar who dropped the philosopher's stone into the pool, and whose ghost has been diving for it ever since. But now, 'an unlucky newspaper threw all into confusion'. It announced the approaching marriage of Lady Clarinda Bossnowl and Crotchet the younger. This aroused in Miss Touchandgo an acute attack of pride, but Chainmail brushed aside her father's absconding as a 'minor consideration'. As he put it later to Fitzchrome:

'I have always understood, from Mr MacQuedy, who is a great oracle, that promises to pay ought not to be kept; the essence of a safe and economical currency being an interminable series of broken promises. There seems to be a difference among the learned as to the way in which promises ought to be broken; but I am not deep enough in their casuistry to enter into such nice distinction.'

When Chainmail returned from Merionethshire, he brought with him Susannah Touchandgo as his bride. As in *Headlong Hall*, the finale is set at Christmas-time. The guests assemble at Crotchet Castle as before, though one or two of the minor ones have been discarded. Dr Morbific had inoculated himself once too often, and 'had explained himself out of this world'. Henbane had also departed, 'on the wings of an infallible antidote'; and Eavesdrop had had 'sentence of exclusion passed upon him, on the motion of the Reverend Doctor Folliott, as a flagitious violator of the



8. James Mill From a drawing that belonged to Mrs Grote



9 Brougham, Henry, 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux.

confidences of private life'. Folliott makes a fine re-entry, to tell MacQuedy of his latest encounter with 'the march of mind':

'Sir, I have seen it, much to my discomfiture. It has marched into my rick-yard, and set my stacks on fire, with chemical materials, most scientificially compounded. It has marched up to my door of my vicarage, a handred and fifty strong; ordered me to surrender half my tithes. . . . It has marched in through my back-parlour shutters, and out again with my silver spoons, in the dead of night. The policeman, who was sent down to examine, says my house has been broken open on the most scientific principles. All this comes of education.'

The entire party moves off to be the Christmas dinner guests of Chainmail and Susannah at Chainmail Hall. Crotchet informs Folliott that 'the learned friend' is in office, and has a title.[12] 'Thank heaven for that', says Folliott, 'he is disarmed from further mischief'. MacQuedy has another piece of news: the firm of Catchflat and Company has stopped payment. This explains the hitherto unexplained absence of young Crotchet. Folliott is quick to draw the moral:

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT: '. . . The day of reckoning, Mr MacQuedy, is the point which your paper money science always leaves out of view. . . . But the dinner is coming. I think you, who are so fond of paper promises, should dine on the bill of fare.'

The Christmas feast is over, and the 'Christmas gambols' are just beginning, when the outside world intrudes. 'Captain Swing' and his incendiarists arrive at the door. The guests combine against the common enemy, Folliott leading the defence by tearing mediaeval weapons from the walls: 'Let us see what the church militant, in the armour of the twelfth century, will do against the march of mind.' The incendiarists are driven off, and the party is resumed. When the time comes for music, Lady Clarinda sings the following stanzas, gazing as she does so at Captain Fitzchrome, and giving him at the end, 'one of the sweetest smiles of their earlier days':

In the days of old,
Lovers felt true passion,
Deeming years of sorrow
By a smile repaid.

Now the charms of gold,
Spells of pride and passion,
Bid them say good morrow
To the best-loved maid.

Through the forests wild,
O'er the mountains lonely,
They were never weary
Honour to pursue:
If the damsel smiled
Once in seven years only,
All their wanderings dreary
Ample guerdon knew.

Now one day's caprice
Weighs down years of smiling,
Youthful hearts are rovers,
Love is bought and sold:
Fortune's gifts may cease,
Love is less beguiling;
Wiser were the lovers,
In the days of old.

From that eventful night, young Crochet was 'seen no more on English mould', but those who knew him best were of the opinion that he had gone across the Atlantic 'with his pockets full of surplus capital, to join his old acquaintance, Mr Touchandgo, in the bank of Dotandcarryonetown'. Lady Clarinda refused to be put up in the money-market for a second time and the Captain 'induced her, with Lord Foolincourt's hard-wrung consent, to share with him a more humble, but less precarious fortune, than that to which she had been destined as the price of a rotten borough'.

When Crotchet Castle appeared there were violent reactions for and against it. The *Literary Gazette* of February 1831 said: 'Were we to be asked as to who is the wittiest writer in England, we should say Mr Peacock'. On the other hand, William Maginn, in *Fraser's Magazine* for August, described him as 'an ignorant stupid, poor

devil, who has no fun, little learning, no facility, no *easiness*'. Modern opinion seems equally divided. A. E. Dyson calls it 'altogether the harshest and least pleasing of Peacock's novels', though he admits that 'the militant tone occurs almost wholly at the beginning'.[13] Others regard it as the culmination of Peacock's writing. J. B. Priestley speaks of two men at work, the humourist and the satirist, but surely with Peacock this is always so.

How fat is Peacock to be identified with Folliott? The short, and, it seems to me, the only answer is: sometimes. At moments Folliot expresses his views, at others, Chainmail reflects his emotions. It is surely an artificial simplification to attempt to pin our elusive author down like this, just as it is surely naive to imagine that all his minor characters are based on people of whom we happen to have heard. Trillo, for instance, may be Victor Novello; in his extemporized poems, there may be a hint of Theodore Hook; or he may be a composite portrait of these and others. Again, MacQuedy is often thought to be Robert MacCulloch, who came from the *Edinburgh Review* to be Professor of Political Economy at the University of London. But William F. Kennedy sees him, and others of Peacock's economists, as composite figures.[14] Again, Lady Clarinda may have a touch of Marianne de St Croix, but there are probably other ladies present, as in the poem 'Love and Age'. Susannah Touchandgo we can more surely recognize. If she is the Oread, then Lady Clarinda is the Poliad of Peacock's life. [15]

David Garnett feels that the book has not the unity of *Nightmare Abbey*. But it seems to me that Peacock may have been experimenting, and successfully so, with the use of symphonic form. First, an *Allegro con brio*—the gathering of the guests and the dinner-party; then a Scherzo—Folliott's adventures with the Nude Venuses, the foot-pads, and the Charity Commissioners; a slow, lyrical movement—Chainmail's romance in North Wales; and then a robust finale, recapitulating the various themes, with the climax of the battle against the incendiarists. This is only one aspect of the 'musicality' (Paulina Salz's word, and I can find no better one) which increasingly informs Peacock's writing.

Many attempts have been made to define the unique quality of Peacock's prose in its maturity. 'Tacitean' is one description;

but the critic who seems to me to have come nearest to capturing its essence is Oliver Elton:

> '. . . The style is the same, except that it gets better and better . . . being, as one critic well says, "rather engraved than written". . . . Peacock, we feel, has scored out every word which he feels will not ring as sharply fifty years afterwards. Yet he does not write, like Sheridan, for the prepared joke; he does not seem to know himself what is coming; there is the true air of *impromptu*, only no misses are allowed.'

For the next and last novel we have to wait nearly thirty years. In the following chapters we shall see why Peacock stopped writing, and how he gradually began again.

Chapter Eighteen

THE ROUTE TO INDIA

The years immediately preceding *Crotchet Castle* were busy ones for Peacock at East India House. This perhaps is a good moment to take a general view of his remarkable career there.

The Honourable East India Company was, it has been said, founded under Queen Elizabeth, remodelled under Queen Anne and destroyed under Queen Victoria.[1] As 'The Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading with the East Indies' it had received its Royal Charter in 1601. Its doom was pronouneed by Palmerston in 1858, two years after Peacock had retired from the post of Chief Examiner, and just 250 years after its first ship had reached the coast of India. When Peacock entered its service in 1819, it occupied an imposing building in Leadenhall Street. On the tympanum of the pediment, a group of figures, designed by John Bacon, showed George III in Roman costume, defending the commerce of the East, holding his sword in his left hand in a decidedly unwarlike manner. Above him was Britannia on a lion, flanked by Europe on a horse and Asia on a camel. Inside, the building was equally impressive, and the great traders, travellers and soldiers of the time passed in and out of its doors.

We have heard how the appointment of James Mill, Edward Strachey, and Peacock was approved by ballot in 1819 and confirmed two years later.[2] At that time none of the three was appointed to be Chief Assistant to M'Culloch the Chief Examiner, so that to a certain extent an element of rivalry must have existed between them, and we can be sure that meanwhile they were closely watched by the permanent staff. Sir William Foster, tells the story of a permanent official being asked in what style he should compose his dispatches, and being told 'The style *we* like here is the Hundrum'.

One can imagine how such a man would regard the arrival of a novelist, and an unorthodox novelist at that. But Peacock's dispatches, says Strachey, were 'neat and exact, typical of the man'.

When Mill became Assistant Examiner on 9 April 1823, Strachey offered his resignation but was persuaded to reconsider it. Strachey's and Peacock's salaries were both increased by £200, as from the preceding Lady Day, which brought Peacock's to £1,000 a year. The next promotion occurred on 8 December 1830, when M'Culloch retired, and Mill succeeded him as Examiner at £1,900 a year. The post of Assistant Examiner, vacated by Mill, was now allowed to lapse, and Strachey and Peacock both became Senior Assistants to the Examiner at £1,200. Then, in February 1832, Strachey died, and David Hill, a man of eighteen years' experience in the Madras Civil Service, was brought in as a new Assistant at £1,000. On 17 February 1836, Strachey having died, Peacock became Assistant Examiner at £1,500; and the last stage is recorded in a Court Minute of 27 July of that year:

'Resolved that having proceeded to consider the Department of Examiner of India Correspondence in consequence of the lamented death of Mr James Mill, Mr Thomas Love Peacock, the Assistant Examiner, be appointed Examiner; that Mr David Hill be appointed Assistant Examiner, that Mr John Stuart Mill succeed to the station vacated by the promotion of Mr Hill, and that Salaries of the three Officers continue at the present amount, viz.

Examiner	£2,000 per annum
Assistant Examiner	£1,500 „ „
First Assistant	£1,200 „ „

taking effect from Midsummer last.'

Peacock had in fact been doing Mill's work for some months during the latter's illness. He held the Examinership till his retirement in 1856. But the bare record of his career gives no idea of the significance of his achievement at East India House. In 1829 Thomas Waghorn, a young British sailor, had been sent by a committee of merchants in Madras and Calcutta to attempt to persuade the government or the East India Company to promote steam naviga-

tion on the Red Sea. He met with opposition, but was allowed to make a test voyage. Meanwhile Peacock was put on to the problem, with his terms of reference enlarged to include the whole question of speeding up communications with India. (At that time, the mail arrived twice a year.) The problem had two main aspects; steam as against sail, and the question of the best route. One was via Suez and the Red Sea; the other, overland to Aleppo and down the Euphrates. Peacock inclined to the latter, and sent a number of queries to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen, who passed them on to the Consul-General at Alexandria. He in turn handed them on to Captain, later General Sir F. R. Chesney, who was in Egypt on a political mission for Sir Robert Gordon, the British Ambassador in Constantinople. Amongst other things, Peacock asked for:

'Information respecting the road from Scanderoon to points in communication with India—i.e. from that place as well as from Lattaquie and Antioch, respectively, to Aeppo.

'From Aleppo to Bir, and to Beles on the Euphrates.

'The number of days required to perform the journey by each route, distinguishing between a journey to be performed by travellers with attendants, and one by an express messenger. . . .

'Trade on the Euphrates; extent of it; in vessels or boats; their size and draught of water.

'At what point navigation ceases. . . .

'State of the tribes on the sides of the Euphrates, particularly the right side.

'To what point might a steam vessel mount the Euphrates?

'Route from Aleppo by the Great Desert to Bussorah, and also by the Little Desert to Bagdad.

'Information as to the number of days, means of obtaining despatch, and general security for travellers.'

Chesney was 'strongly impressed with the importance of these questions', and gave them in full because he felt that they deserved to be made known.[3] In 1832, when he met Peacock at East India House, he had another example of Peacock's thoroughness:

'I found that he was deeply versed in the ancient history of the

Euphrates, and that he had not only been the first to bring this line of communication with India forward, but that he had collected in a thick book every private notice he could find of that river, whether contained in Gibbon, Balbi, or any other work. Under these circumstances our meeting was of great interest—we talked much on the subject—and he pressed me greatly to send him my memoir, which I felt inclined to do.'

This was a document which Chesney had prepared, recommending the Euphrates route, and with Peacock's encouragement it was privately circulated in February 1833. Meanwhile, in the early months of the previous year, Peacock had appeared before a Select Parliamentary Committee as the East India Company's representative. He admitted that the Red Sea route, with a ship canal from Suez to the Mediterranean, was a possibility, but he saw strong objections to it. One was the enormous cost of coal. Another was that it would benefit continental ports, to the detriment of British interests. He therefore recommended the overland route through Aleppo, with steamers on the Euphrates. One wonders what the members of the Select Committee must have thought of information with which he furnished them regarding the freight of boats on the Euphrates in the time of Herodotus, and the expeditions by that route of Trajan and Julian. But he produced another argument, which may come as surprise to those who regard him as having been out of touch with the affairs of his own day: 'The Russians . . . now have steam-boats on the Volga and the Caspian Sea. . . . They will do everything in Asia that is worth the doing, and that we leave undone.'

With Captain Chesney's arrival in the autumn, and his report circulated in the early months of 1833, the Euphrates scheme gained fresh advocates. One was the Right Honourable John Sullivan, who had travelled down the river Tigris on a raft, supported by inflated skins, in 1782. Sullivan lobbied Lord Landsdowne, Lord Palmerston, Lord Goderich, and other prominent people, and the result was an audience with the King. On 9 June 1834 Peacock and Captain Chesney were summoned before another Parliamentary Select Committee, of whose proceedings Chesney

notes: 'At twelve the Steam Committee commenced its labours with Peacock, who answered all things clearly and quickly.' The final outcome was that Lord Palmerston persuaded the Government to set aside £20,000 for a Euphrates expedition, with Captain Chesney in command.

In (of all periodicals) the *Edinburgh Review*, there appeared in January 1835, a 'Memorandum respecting the Application of Steam Navigation to the internal and external Communications of India'. It is highly technical, and runs to thrity-eight pages.[4] His assiduity in his work at India House is also shown in thirty volumes of Marine Records.[5] What is more, he also acted as spokesman for the East India Company on two tricky occasions at about this time.

The first was in July 1834, when the company was sued by James Silk Buckingham, MP for Sheffield. Eleven years earlier he had been expelled from India because of criticism he had made of the East India Company in his *Calcutta Journal*. He claimed that his expulsion was illegal, and that he had lost heavily by it, and in 1834 secured a hearing before a Select Committee, conducting his own case. Peacock represented the company, and, it is said, established the grounds of its action with the skill of an experienced barrister. A number of people, including Jeremy Bentham, Walter Coulson, Sir John Bowring, and John Cam Hobhouse, felt that the company's behaviour had been unjust, and the Select Committee did in fact recommend that Buckingham should be reimbursed for his losses.[6] Two years later, Peacock again represented the company before a Select Committee on Salt (British India), when the company's right to the salt monopoly was contested by a group of Liverpool merchants. Peacock argued that the merchants of Liverpool were merely trying to secure for themselves a privilege already possessed by the company, and in this case the company won the day. A further Select Committee reviewed the question of the Euphrates route and of steam navigation in 1837. By this time Peacock was Chief Examiner, and evidently felt that he could speak a little more freely than before. His observations included: 'I am more afraid of deference to popular clamour than I am of anything under heaven.' Also: 'I am not sure that it would be any benefit to the people of India to send Europeans among them.'

There might, he felt, be a sinister effect on the morals and domestic habits of the Hindoos. He also foresaw that such an infiltration might lead to Indian students coming to London. On this he commented: 'I think interest will overcome prejudice everywhere.'

But Peacock's most far-reaching innovation was to establish vessels propelled by steam alone, and made of iron instead of wood. After the 1834 report, two vessels were built, the *Atalanta* and the *Berenice*, larger than any so far employed by the company on the Red Sea route. In 1839, after another Select Committee, six new iron vessels were ordered, Of these, the *Nemesis*, *Phlegethon*, *Arcadia* and *Medusa* were built by Lairds of Birkenhead, and sent out in the name of the makers. The first two were dispatched under steam round the Cape, instead of being sent out in pieces like their predecessors. The *Pluto* and the *Proserpina* were built in London under Peacock's supervision, and repeatedly tested before being sent out via the Cape. All except the *Arcadia* saw service in the Chinese War.[7] Peacock attended the tests personally, and took great delight in his 'iron chickens', as he called them. It is a family tradition that he had a good deal of trouble persuading people that they would not sink. And even when their use in transport had been proved, he received, as late as 16 October 1846, the following letter from Lord Auckland of the Admiralty:

> My dear Sir,
>
> I am greatly obliged to you for the very instructive and valuable paper which you have sent to me upon Iron Vessels. It seems to me very satisfactorily to prove that iron is a material which may very advantageously be used for the construction of vessels intended to act in shallow waters, and indeed for vessels intended to be used for many other purposes, but I apprehend that construction of this material is not adapted to the general purposes of war. . . .

Later, officialdom was to say exactly the same thing about the aeroplane.

The main evidence for Peacock's part in the promotion of steam navigation is contained in a memorandum written by John Laird in

1873 and preserved by Mrs Clarke. But he did contribute two letters to *The Times* on 3 and 7 November 1838, when the *Semiramis* failed to make the journey from Bombay to the Red Sea during the summer monsoon. This, he declared, was solely due to a deficiency of fuel:

'The *Semiramis*, on her outward voyage, went right ahead againts the south-east trade wind. She then cleared away one bugbear of steam navigation, and I am still of opinion that if she had had a depot near Guardafici she would have cleared away another.'

Passenger transit to India was a matter of just as much interest to Peacock as the delivery of the mail. He recommended St Helena as a coaling station for steamers going round the Cape of Good Hope, and was an authority on the price and consumption of coal for shipping purposes. Also in 1838, he wrote a letter to an unidentified correspondent, 'J. F.':[8]

My dear Sir,

No European power that intends to march through Central Asia need care about the actual possessors of the divisions of nominal supremacy. Belong Herat to whom it may before an European army walks up to it, it belongs to that army from the moment of its approach. So with the whole country from the Mediterranean to the Indus. As to the establishment of local interest by diplomacy, I consider it mere child's play. If we do not mean to fight in Central Asia, we may as well leave the field to Russia, who certainly does mean to fight there some time or other. If we do mean to fight under any conceivable circumstances, let us conceive those circumstances and see how we mean to fight. Surely we shall begin by sending troops up the Indus. Indian troops from India, but European troops, how? I say down the Euphrates. Then let us retain our present pre-occupation of that river, which we can now do without offence, and make our pre-arrangements quietly but surely. . . .'

In his attitude to the Russian question, Peacock, as A. B. Young pointed out, was anticipating Lord Beaconsfield in advocating a consolidated Turkey. When asked at a Select Committee whether

he thought it desirable that the whole of the countries in the line from Scanderoon to Bussorah should be under Turkish government, he replied: 'I think it would be very desirable, for it would preserve the peace of the river, and get up a power which it would be difficult for Russia to oppose.'

Peacock held the Chief Examinership for twenty years. Colonel W. F. Prideaux, whose father was in the Examiner's office at the time, had 'a vivid recollection of the old gentleman with his keen eye and enormous nimbus of white hair, wearing, as he usually did, a white tie and old-fashioned tail coat'. P. A. Daniel, a junior clerk during Peacock's later years there, remembers him arriving punctually every morning, and being ushered with great ceremony to his office by uniformed messengers. Otherwise, although he was invariably kind to his subordinates, they saw little of him. With the senior staff, he seems to have been a little more unbending. Sir George Birdwood described him as 'a teller of good stories', and says, 'Wherever he went he kept those around him in roars of laughter, and he was an immense favourite with all the Directors'. As usual, Peacock was different things to different men. Another brief and intriguing description of him, by someone who 'enjoyed his company extremely', is that of Sir M. E. Grant Duff: 'He was utterly unlike anybody I have ever seen before or since.'

His retirement from East India House came in 1856. A Court Minute dated 28 March of that year records:

> 'That in parting with Mr Peacock and Mr Hill the Court desires to record the high sense they entertain of the zeal, ability, and integrity manifested by them in the discharge of their important public duties, and to assure them that they carry with them on their retirement the best wishes of those whom they have so long and so ably, and so usefully served.'[9]

His superannuation allowance was fixed at £1,333 6s 8d per annum, which suggests that accountants were not unknown in those days. John Stuart Mill succeeded him, but the office of Chief Examiner had only two years to run. By 1858 Palmerston's Bill for the Better Government of India was pending, with its intention to dethrone the East India Company from its long held position of

power. John Stuart Mill drew up a petition in its defence, which is said to have been a masterpiece of its kind; but it was unavailing. The company continued in a skeletal form until it could be finally dissolved on 1 June 1874, and by that time East India House had long been razed to the ground. One of London's famous blue historic plaques commemorates the site of the building in Leadenhall Street which Peacock entered so punctually every morning for so many years. Whatever he expected when he first passed through those doors, he could look back, when he took his farewell, on a distinguished and important career. He had speeded up the Indian mails from twice a year to once a month and for twenty years had been a key figure in one of the largest trading concerns the world has ever seen.

One factor, in his success at East India House, was that neither the Euphrates nor the sea were new to him. With his passion for rivers and out-of-the-way learning, one can be sure that by the time he had finished his research for *Palmyra* he knew more about the Euphrates than many people do in their lifetime. And as for the sea, the traditions of the Love family, the stories told by his grandfather, and his instruction in navigation aboard H.M.S. *Venerable* had all prepared him to turn the paper boats of his youth into the 'iron chickens' of his middle years.[10] When he went out testing the *Pluto* and the *Proserpina* he had found, in a characteristically indirect but inevitable way, a destination which one side of him had been seeking. Peter Auber—if it was he who spotted Peacock for the job—did the East India Company a very good turn.

Some years after his retirement, Peacock received a letter from his cousin, Harriet Love, then staying with Admiral Ommanay Love at Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight. It is dated 11 September 1862, and its postscript must have given Peacock deep pleasure:

> 'Your old Pilot "Bright" is wonderfully well, and pursuing his calling, but in a very different craft (a half-decked Wherry) to the beautiful *Proserpina*.
>
> 'He thoroughly enjoys talking of the Cruises with you, and has always thought "Mr Peacock was meant for an Admiral"!'

In watching Peacock's career with the East India Company we

have been carried on through the years far beyond the early thirties, where this chapter began. Now we must go back, and see, how over this same period his official work and responsibilities affected his writing and his private life.

Chapter Nineteen

THE PATH TO SILENCE

Peacock's decision in 1823 to accommodate his family at Lower Halliford was a generous one. But it meant that he saw little of them.[1] When Jane's health collapsed in 1826, after the sudden death of the second daughter, Margaret Love, all the responsibility, as we have seen, fell on the mother. We have one glimpse of her in 1831, when she wrote to Peacock, then on holiday in Wales with Mary Ellen, aged ten, and the younger brother, Edward. Sarah wrote:

> 'I wish you could persuade her to love her brother better, poor little boy he has had none of the advantages she has had—and therefore she should make allowances—he is a very amiable little and would be very fond of her—if she would let him.'

Two years later came the shock of Sarah's death, and with it Peacock's realization that there was no one to take her place. Says Edith Nicolls:

> 'His eldest daughter was then only twelve years old, and from the death of little Margaret in 1826, he had left his children entirely in his mother's care at Lower Halliford, his wife's sad health making it impossible that she should attend to the care of the children, or undertake the housekeeping. He could now but very indifferently supply her tender loving care by a governess, and servants to take charge of his children and consequently, for the next twenty years, he did not publish anything at all.'

That last sentence requires qualification, and we shall return to it. But, while considering the situation in 1833, let us not forget one other member of the household, little Mary Rosewall, whom the Peacocks had adopted after the death of Margaret. Mary, or May, as

she became affectionately called, devoted her entire loyalty to the Peacock family, and at Peacock's death, she became his sole executrix. But in 1833 she was only a child. One can imagine that she did her best for Rosa Jane, while Mary Ellen and Edward went their own way. As for Jane Peacock, there is one brutal reference in a letter from Mary Shelley to that usual repository of complaint, Maria Gisborne:[2] 'I have not seen Peacock for some time. His wife lives in London—she is quite mad—his children in the country all by themselves except for his weekly visits.'

Mary was a hard, impatient woman. All that can be said for certain about Jane is that, after Margaret's death, she was not sufficiently well to run the house, or to bring up the family. One puzzle is why the cautious Peacock had made no plans to meet this emergency when it happened, as it was bound to. He may have hoped that, with the powerful personality of Sarah no longer overshadowing her, Jane might have been able to seize the reins of responsibility. If he thought that, he was disappointed.

At this very time his work at East India House was at a particularly arduous and critical stage. It is not surprising that he became ill in 1835. Since he lived to a grand old age, it can be assumed that this was a matter of the moment, brought on by stress and worry. By now, he had given up regular musical criticism. This may have been due to depression, or pressure of work, or a combination of both. But there was another reason; he saw his beloved Italian opera deteriorating—or, at any rate, its presentation at is London home, the King's Theatre. Both in the inadequacies of production and the behaviour of the audiences, this was not the Italian opera to which he had introduced Shelley fifteen years or so before. In 1834, when he reviewed the fourth edition of a book by the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, entitled *Musical Reminiscences, containing an Account of the Italian Opera in England from* 1773, he quoted with approval Lord Mount Edgcumbe's view that the whole system was radically bad, and that nothing would put it right but 'an entire change of proprietors, of managers, of all parties connected with the theatre'. As Peacock himself observed, the public do not complain; but they 'exercise another right more fatal to the management, and more just to its misconduct—the right of staying away'.

All the same, *pace* Edith Nicolls, he was still writing. Two years later an article appeared on Bellini, the composer who had died in 1835 in his early thirties. Bellini, he felt, was 'a melodist by nature, and a harmonist by education'. His music had:

> '. . . neither the splendid variety of Rossini, nor the consummate combinations of Mozart, nor the torrent of sound of Beethoven, with its mysterious current of murmured undersong which creeps on in such delicious and marvellous intermixture with the vast mainstream of harmony. In all these composers there was genius for harmony. In Bellini there is only genius for melody.'

In the course of this review we find this *laudator temporis acti* looking forward to the possibilities of a new music: 'As there is no possible sequence of sounds to which human passion does not give utterance, so there is no possible consonance or dissonance which will not find its place in dramatic music.'

When Beethoven was first heard of in England, he reminds his readers, 'it was as a madman who wrote crazy music which nobody could perform'. Music critics, it seems, were no better than literary ones: 'The oracle shakes his head, and the profane take it for granted that there is something in it.'

Peacock's earlier critical articles had appeared in the *Westminster Review*. This had been started in 1824 under the patronage of Jeremy Bentham, and had been regarded as the official organ for the Utilitarians. But when in the early thirties it was bought by Sir John Molesworth, the Utilitarians transferred their allegiance to the *London Review*. This is where both the two musical articles just referred to made their appearance. He also contributed two articles on French literature. 'French Comic Romances' was published in October 1835, and 'L'Épicier' in January 1836. The first contains some interesting generalizations on his own type of novel. 'An intense love of truth, and a clear apprehension of truth, are both essential to comic writing of the first class.'

Rabelais, he pointed out, was 'one of the wisest and most learned, as well of wittiest of men'. But mainly he is concerned with the changes in French literary taste and their effect on French literature in his lifetime. This leads him to say of the French Revolution that

it 'ended like one in Pekin, where the people have the felicity of seeing Ho-Fum put over their heads in place of Fum-Ho. The charter turned out a lie, and "the best of republics" the beginning of the vilest and most sordid of tyrannies'.

His particular theme is to contrast the writings of Pigault le Brun and Paul de Kock, and in the second article he argues that the work of each is conditioned by the attitude of his readers. Pigault le Brun wrote for revolutionaries; but Paul de Kock, whom he describes as 'the most popular of French novelists', is 'totally divested of every trace of political opinion'.[3] This is because he is writing for the modern épicier or the small shopkeeper. Nowadays, says Peacock, the épicier is not, as in 1790, '*un enfant de la patrie* singing the Marsellois hymn, or at least listening approvingly to those who sang it',

'. . . he has had sufficient experience of change of masters to desire to change no more. . . . He acquisces and maintains. He is the great *vis inertiae* that presses down anarchy, and upholds the colossal mass of brute physical force, embodied in military power, which supports the existing order of things. He is the broad-backed tortoise that stands upon chaos, and carries the elephant that carries the world. . . .'

At this same period (the watermark of the paper is 1833) we find him branching out in another direction. *The Lord of the Hills* is an unfinished ghost story set in Bohemia, where a kind of Bohemian Puck disconcerts travellers with his unseen laughter—an idea which Peacock uses again when the laughter of Jove greets the spirit-rappers in the mock-Aristophanic comedy in *Gryll Grange*. The fragment is interesting as his only piece of writing with the supernatural as its main *motif*, though his love of ghost stories is reflected again and again in the novels.[1]

In 1836 came the death of James Mill, and Peacock then decided that it was no longer necessary to suppress the *Paper Money Lyrics*. In 1837 Henry Cole published one or two in a short-lived venture called *The Guide*, and then they were privately printed in an edition of 100 copies. In a preface Peacock mentioned that they had originated in the winter of 1825–6, 'during the prevalence of an influenza

to which the beautiful fabric of paper-credit is periodically subject'. But in the intervening years they had become a collection of parodies on Peacock's contemporaries, which reminds one of *Tricks of the Trade* by Sir John Squire. Southey is there, of course; so are Thomas Moore and Campbell—the latter represented by a piece which begins 'Ye kite flyers of Scotland', and which contains the memorable line, 'MacBanquo's occupation's gone'. Coleridge has a version of the Three Wise Men of Gotham, 'mystically-financially interpreted'. Sir Walter Scott has a vigorous border ballad:

The Scotts, Kerrs, and Murrays, and Deloraines all,
The Hughies o'Hawdon, and Wills-o'-the-Wall,
The Willimondswicks, and the hard-riding Dicks,
Are staunch to the last to their old border tricks:
Wine flows not from heath, and bread grinds not from stone,
They must reeve for their living, or life they'll have none.

Wordsworth is neatly caught with lines of studied simplicity:

The paper-money goes about: it works extremely well;
I find it buys me everything that people have to sell.

And there is a charming picture of Wordsworth's domestic life when the beer comes in:

Which Mrs W brings to me, which she herself did brew;
Oh! doubly sweet is double X from Mistress Double U.

Included in the collection was the piece on Lord Brougham called 'The Fate of a Broom', written in 1831 and also given by Peacock in his notes to *Crotchet Castle,* and a curious fragment called BYP and NOP, the letters standing for 'By Payment' and 'No Payment', two alternative methods of getting on in the army:

Quoth Byp to Nop, 'I made my hop
By paying for promotion.'
Quoth Nop to Byp, 'I made my skip
By aid of *petticoatian*.'

Peacock also put in 'Rich and Poor', perhaps to clinch the argument that it was indeed by him, and not by Thomas Barham.

'A Bill for the Better Promotion of Oppression on the Sabbath Day' was written at about this time, but not included. No doubt he felt that 'Rich and Poor' said enough.

Also in 1837, there appeared, as Volume LXII of Bentley's 'Standard Novels', new editions of *Headlong Hall*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Maid Marian* and *Crochet Castle*. He was persuaded to write an introduction.

'All these little publications appeared originally without prefaces. I left them to speak for themselves; and I thought I might very fitly preserve my own impersonality, having never intruded on the personality of others, nor taken any liberties but with public conduct and public opinions. But an old friend assures me, that to publish a book without a preface is like entering a drawing-room without making a bow In deference to this opinion, though I am not quite clear of its soundness, I make my prefaratory bow at this eleventh hour.'

Since the first novel, twenty-two years before, many things, he says, have changed. The Holyhead mail has gone; so have the rotten boroughs, 'though there are some very pretty pocket properties, which are their worthy successors'. But the 'classes of tastes, feelings and opinions, which were brought into play in these little tales, remain substantially the same'.

'Perfectibilians, deteriorationists, status-quoites, phrenologists, transcendentalists, political economists, theorists in all sciences, projectors in all arts, morbid visionaries, romantic enthusiasts, lovers of music, lovers of the picturesque, and lovers of good dinners, march, and will march for ever, *pari passu* with the march of mechanics, which some facetiously call the march of intellect.... The great principle of Right is Might is as flourishing now as in the days of Maid Marian: the array of false pretensions, moral, political, and literary, is as imposing as ever: the rulers of the world still feel things in their effects, and never forsee them in their causes; and political mountebanks continue, and will continue, to puff nostrums and practise leger-demain under the eyes of the multitude . . . following, like the "learned friend" of *Crotchet*

Castle, a course as tortuous as a river, but in a reverse process; beginning by being dark and deep, and ending by being transparent.'

He had also been persuaded to write for *Bentley's Miscellany*, begun in January 1837 under the editorship of Charles Dickens.[5] To the first number he contributed a poem in the style of Barham called 'The Legend of Manor Hall''. The second contained the 'Recollections of Childhood', already quoted at length in the first chapter of this book. His next appearance in the *Miscellany* is in the number for January 1838, with a poem on George Cruickshank's illustration 'New Years Eve' for the *Comic Almanack*

A great philosopher art thou, George Cruickshank,
In thy unmatched grotesqueness! Antic dance,
Wine, mirth and music, welcome the New Year;
Who makes her entry as a radiant child,
With smiling face, in holiday apparel,
Bearing a cornucopia, crowned and clustered
With all the elements of festal joy:
All smiles and promises. But looking closely
Upon that smiling face, 'tis but a mask;
Fitted so well, it almost seems a face;
But still a mask. What features lurk beneath
The rolling months will show. Thy Old Year passes—
Danced out in mockery by the festive band—
A faded form with thin and pallid face,
In spectral weeds; her mask upon the ground,
And Amalthea's horn reversed, and emptied
Of all good things—not even hope remaining.
Such will the New Year be: that smiling mask
Will fall; to some how soon, to many later:
And last to all! The same transparent shade
Of wasted means and broken promises
Will make its exit; and another Year
Will enter masked and smiling, and be welcomed
With minstrelsy and revelry, as this is.

He had reasons for pessimism. Twenty years before, he had laid

the foundations of a new life. At fifty-three he was a successful but lonely man.[6] But as if in compensation, the wheels of chance now brought him together with a man who was to be his closest friend for the rest of his life.

When reviewing Thomas Moore's *Life of Byron*, Peacock had addressed, through Sir John Bowring, some questions to Sir John Cam Hobhouse, Byron's executor, and had received an extremely courteous reply. In 1839, as Lord Broughton, Hobhouse received Peacock in his capacity of President of the Board of Control, the body appointed by the Government to supervise the East India Company. He was flattered to know Peacock's opinion that 'his retirement from the India Board would be a public calamity'. In October 1840 Peacock went down to stay with him at Erle Stoke, near Westbury, and was his guest for a fortnight. From then onwards he was often there, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, was to meet there many of the great men of the day. He also became devoted to Lord Broughton's little daughters, Julia, Charlotte and Sophia, and was very popular with them as a storyteller. Cole gives a rhymed letter sent by Broughton to Peacock at about this time:

Peacock! examiner of all things East,
Thinks I've forgot his promise; not the least!
He said—for all his sayings I remember—
'I'll be at Erle-Stoke sometime in December.'
December's come, alas! and almost gone;
But he, oh, shameless mortal lingers on . . .

Come, come, if only for a change, come down,
The world's away, and London's out of town.
And all the sixteen sages that of late
Sat fixed in Downing Street to save the State,
To Dan and to the devil leave the nation,
And quit for three whole weeks their high vocation;
You too, shut up your shop, and make it known,
That India's old enough to walk alone . . .

In short, just keep your promise to the text,
And be at Erle-Stoke upon Thursday next.

Meanwhile, the republication of four of the novels had resulted

in the first general critical assessment of Peacock as a novelist, apart from the notices immediately consequent upon the appearance of each book. This was by James Spedding, in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1839. It is the kind of lukewarm notice an author can well do without. At least Spedding appreciated that the latest novels were an improvement on the earlier ones: 'The humour seems to run deeper: the ridicule is informed with a just appreciation of the thing ridiculed: the disputants are more informed, and less like scoffers in disguise: there is more of natural warmth and life in the characters.'

But, like Herbert Paul, writing forty years later, Spedding was, as Clive Bell says, first and foremost an Establishment man, and Peacock's 'questionable volumes' are suitable to be kept 'within reach of our easier chair'. 'Good books', Spedding concludes, 'are not so plentiful that we can afford to throw them away because they are not better', and 'the refined beauty of the composition . . . is of itself sufficient to keep them on the upper shelves of circulating libraries'. Such a tepid review can scarcely have encouraged Peacock to go on writing.

After the New Year poem, Bentley published a couple of the *Paper Money Lyrics*, unacknowledged. Then there was nothing for a number of years. But he did write one poem, in 1842, which was not published for nearly another twenty years. When he was at home in Lower Halliford he used to walk along the tow-path to Newark Abbey, where many years before he had met Fanny Falkner. The poem which he now wrote is often given in books on Peacock near the beginning, as an appendage to an account of those meetings. But it is better read in its historical context—a secret utterance by a lonely man nearing his sixtieth year.

NEWARK ABBEY

August 1842
With a Reminiscence of August 1807

I gaze, where August's sunbeam falls
Along these gray and lonely walls,
Till in its light absorbed appears
The lapse of five-and-thirty years.

If change there be, I trace it not
In all this consecrated spot:
No new imprint of Ruin's march
On roofless wall and frameless arch:
The hills, the woods, the fields, the stream,
Are basking in the self-same beam:
The fall, that turns the unseen mill,
As then it murmured, murmurs still:
It seems, as if in one were cast
The present and the imaged past,
Spanning, as with a bridge sublime,
That awful lapse of human time,
That gulph, unfathomably spread,
Between the living and the dead.

For all too well my spirit feels
The only change this scene reveals:
The sunbeams play, the breezes stir,
Unseen, unfelt, unheard by her,
Who, on that long-past August day,
First saw with me these ruins gray.

Whatever span the Fates allow,
Ere I hsall be as she is now,
Still in my bosom's inmost cell
Shall that deep-treasured memory dwell:
That, more than language can express,
Pure miracle of lovliness,
Whose voice so sweet, whose eyes so bright,
Were my soul's music, and its light,
In those blest days, when life was new,
And hope was false, but love was true.

After that, there was nothing for years. The walk to Newark Abbey was the end of the path to silence.

Chapter Twenty

MARY ELLEN AND MEREDITH

When Peacock wrote 'Newark Abbey', Mary Ellen was twenty-one. She had grown up into a beautiful, vivacious girl, adored by her father, spoilt by the susceptible Hogg, and admired by the young men of her own generation, both in London and in Surrey. In 1843 she married Lieutenant Edward Nicolls of the Royal Navy. Here was a happy renewal of the naval traditions of the Love family. The father was a distinguished man of his day. General Sir Edward Nicolls, KCB, had been a member of the Royal Marines since the age of sixteen, and earned the nickname of 'Fighting Nicolls' through being wounded 24 times in 107 engagements.[1] Two months after their marriage, Mary Ellen was with her husband aboard his ship, the *Dwarf*, at Tarberd, Kerry, in the mouth of the River Shannon. A ship that was anchored nearby began to drag its moorings in a storm. Mary Ellen watched from the deck of the *Dwarf* while he put off in a gig to help. His craft jibbed, and he and one of the men were stunned by a swinging block, and fell into the sea. Neither came to the surface. In the autumn, Mary Ellen gave birth to a daughter, Edith Nicolls.

This was a time when Mary Ellen needed the comfort of her father. If he could have made the journey to Lower Halliford every night, the aftermath might have been very different. But by one of those ironies that run through his life, when the railway reached Walton-on-Thames, in 1848, it was just too late. By that time, the centre of gravity of his family had moved from Lower Halliford to London.

Edward, Mary Ellen's younger brother, had been invalided out of the Royal Navy, and had been secured a job at East India House. It was probably through Edward that Mary Ellen had met her

first husband. It was also through him that she met her second. Edward had developed as an athletic type—a good boxer and oarsman, and a man who liked doing the sixty-mile walk to Brighton. But he also had literary inclinations, and in the late 1840s both he and his sister had become part of a literary coterie led by a solicitor named Richard Stephen Charnock. A lively character, and a jovial cynic, Charnock had started a private periodical called the *Monthly Observer*, to which the members of his set contributed, and which each took it in turn to edit, writing critical notices of the contributions of the others.[2]

Among Charnock's group with Mary Ellen and her brother Edward were two young men from East India House—one a member of the St Croix family, the other the P. A. Daniel mentioned in an earlier chapter—and also Charnock's clerk, who is thus described by J. J. Mayoux: '*... an beau jeune homme, tête de Christ, cheveux et barbe blond ardent, coeur et l'âme a l'avenant bouillonnant de poésie en fusion. George Meredith.*' Another member of the group was the painter Henry Wallis. The cast was assembled for the second tragedy of Mary Ellen's life.

Like Charles Dickens, Meredith came from Portsmouth. In 1784, his grandfather, Melchizedek Meredith, had set up there at 73 High Street as a naval outfitter. During the Napoleonic wars business had boomed and the shop became an unofficial club and meeting-place for officers ashore.[3] 'The Great Mel', as he was called, boasted Royal Welsh blood, rode to hounds, joined the yeomanry, and, when he died, was laid out in uniform with sword and helmet at his side Two of his children cut similarly dashing figures: a daughter Louise, married a man who became Consul-General in the Azores; another, Catherine, married a Lieutenant Ellis, who fought at Trafalgar and died in 1865 as Commandant of Woolwich.

It fell to the son, Augustus Urmston Meredith, to carry on the family business. He was married off to Jane Eliza Macnamara, the daughter of a local publican. George Meredith, their only child, was born on 4 Februrary 1828. His grandmother died six months later, and his mother died when he was five. When he was ten his father went bankrupt. In his teens he was sent to the Moravian School on the Rhine, at Neuwied, eight miles below Coblenz.

When he returned, after two years, his father, then working in London, applied to the Court of Chancery to have him bound over as an apprentice to some trade or business. The first idea was to apprentice him to a bookseller of Paternoster Row, who had plans to take him to Hong Kong, where he was to open a new branch. Instead, he became clerk to a young solicitor also living in the Row, Richard Stephen Charnock. Here he became friendly with Edward Peacock. They went to prize fights and for long walks together. And through Edward he met Mary Ellen. She was seven years his senior. She was very beautiful. She was also the daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, and Meredith, determined to achieve distinction, had decided that the way to it was by a literary career.

When it became Meredith's turn to act as editor of Charnock's *Monthly Observer*, one of the contributions was a poem by Mary Ellen, portraying her own sense of bereavement through the idea of a blackbird robbed of its mate. In his capacity as editor and critic, Meredith praised the poem highly. Not long afterwards they were engaged. Edith Nicolls says that Merdith was a persistent suitor, and was rejected six times.[4] This is, of course, a situation to bring out the best in Mayoux: '*à la septième fois, les murailles tombèrent*'. They were married at St George's Church, Hanover Square, on 9 August 1849. The church's marriage register for that date carries both their signatures, and also that of Peacock, who gave his daughter away. They settled in Weybridge, just across the Thames from Lower Halliford, and in 1851 Meredith produced a first volume of poems, dedicated to Peacock 'with respect and admiration'.

Let us now leave the Merediths for a moment, and see what glimpses we can get of Peacock over these same few years. He had moved his London address from Blackfriars to 9 John Street, Adelphi. Van Doren, though he does not mention his source of information, tells us that in his chambers there, 'by a touch so Peacockian as almost to seem a matter of his own invention, his cook cherished a tame kangaroo in the kitchen'. When the London and South-Western Railway reached Walton-on-Thames in 1848, he was off to Lower Halliford by the evening train, with a fly waiting at Walton station to take him home.[5] The fatuity of getting

nowhere fast now becomes as regular a theme as the Scots or paper money.

We have already seen, through the eyes of his contemporaries at East India House, how he was becoming 'a picture of hale old age'. This is confirmed by Thackeray, who wrote a letter in 1850 to Mrs Brookfield, discussing the guests at Erle Stoke:

> 'Peacock—did you ever read *Headlong Hall* and *Maid Marian*?—a charming lyrical poet and Horatian satirist he was when a writer; now he is a white-haired jolly old worldling, full of information about India and everything else in the world.'

In fact, the last had not been heard of the poet, nor of the satirist. On 7 February 1851, Lord John Russell's Bill for resisting the Aggression of the Pope had been carried after four nights of debate. Soon after that a poem began to be circulated in the Examiner's Office at East India House, as the *Paper Money Lyrics* had been, and was illustrated by P. A. Daniel, already mentioned as a junior in the office at the time. It was called 'A Goodbye Ballad of Little John Shewinge, how he raysed a Dyvell, and how he coulde not laye hymme'. In other words, how in calling on the support of Anti-Papist factions he had aroused forces which he could not control:

And as the wild infection spread,
The Protestant hydra's every head
Sent forth a yell of zeal:
And pellmell went all forms of dissent,
Each beating its scriptural drum;
Wesleyans and Whitfieldites followed as friends,
And whatever in -onian, -arain ends,
Et omne quod exit in hum.

Peacock's target is sectarianism, but the satire shows his fear of the mob, also seen in the Onevote scene in *Melincourt* and in his evidence before one of the Select Parliamentary Committees.

Another regular guest of Lord Broughton's at Erle Stoke was Macaulay, who, on 31 December 1851, wrote in his Journal:

'I met Peacock, a very clever fellow and a good scholar. I am glad to have an opportunity of being better acquainted with him. We had out Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and several other old fellows, and tried each others' quality pretty well. We are both strong enough in these matters for gentlemen.'

Macaulay noted, though, that Peacock was editing the *Supplices*. 'Aeschylus', he declared, 'is not to be edited by a man whose Greek is only a secondary pursuit.' Evidently Peacock took this opinion to heart; in the *Horae Dramaticae*, which were shortly to appear in *Fraser's*, he struck very much to the by-ways of classical literature. Also at Erle Stoke was Benjamin Disraeli, who professed surprise that Peacock was 'The author of *Headlong Hall*', and declared that he was his 'Master'—a compliment which Peacock modestly disclaimed by saying that he did not know that he had any pupils. But apart from meeting the great men of the day, Peacock loved his visits to Erle Stoke for the company of Lord Broughton's three young daughters. Here he recaptured some of the family life which he had missed at home. He would tell the little girls stories by the hour; and when in September 1849 Julia, the eldest, died, he wrote some lines, formal in style but deeply sincere. They end:

Dear, dear young friend! ingenuous, cordial heart!
And can it be, that thou shouldst first depart?
That age should sorrow o'er thy youthful shrine?
It owns more near, more sacred griefs than mine;
Yet, midst the many who thy loss deplore,
Few loved thee better, and few mourn thee more.

It was during a visit to Erle Stoke in 1851 that Peacock learnt of the death of his own wife, Jane. Something of what he felt is shown in the introduction to *Horae Dramaticae* in the following year:

'Goethe, we think—for we cannot cite chapter and verse—says something to this effect—that the realities of life present little that is either satisfactory or hopeful; and that the only refuge for a mind, which aspires to better views of society, is in the idealities of the theatre.

'Without going to the full extent of thus opinion, we may say, that the drama has been the favourite study of this portion of our plurality, and has furnished to us, on many and many occasions, a refuge of light and tranquillity from the storms and darkness of every-day life.'

Let us return now to George Meredith and Mary Ellen. Across the river, at Weybridge, all was not well. Mary Ellen had suffered at least one miscarriage. Meredith's volume of poems had not been a success. Another child was on the way, and there were pressing financial difficulties. In his study of Peacock and Meredith, A. H. Able has pointed out that, whatever happened afterwards, Peacock at this stage was doing everything he could to make their marriage a success.[6] At his invitation, they moved across from Weybridge into his house at Lower Halliford. Not content with that, he worked with Mary Ellen on a cookery book, *An English Gastronome*. This, never completed or printed, is interesting because it does not concentrate on lavish dishes, such as adorn the banquest in the novels. On the contrary: 'The boiling of Bacon is a very simple subject to comment on—but our main object is to teach *Common Cooks* the art of dressing common food in the best manner.'

But even the simplest cooking has its traps:

'It is said that there are *Seven* chances against the most simple dish being presented to the mouth in absolute perfection; for instance a Leg of Mutton:

1st The Mutton must be *good*,
2nd Must have been kept a *good* time,
3rd Must be roasted on a *good* fire,
4th By a *good Cook*,
5th Who must be in a *good* temper,
6th With all this felicitous combination you must have *good* luck, and
7th *Good* appetite,—the meat and the mouths which are to eat it must be ready for each other.'

This was followed by an 'Essay on Gastronomy', published in *Fraser's Magazine* for December 1851. It is signed with the initials

of Mary Meredith, and there are lines in it, such as, 'We have been present at some balls in France', which Peacock could scarcely have written. But the Halliford editors say that it is obviously by Peacock. If Mary Ellen collected the cheque, this was another way Peacock found to help the couple, without appearing to patronize them. Carl Dawson calls this 'Peacock's most self-sufficient essay apart from *The Four Ages*', and points out that he 'loosely applies its format'. The historical part of the essay is remarkable: the bill of fare, running for pages, of 'A Feast of the East India Company at Merchantailors' Hall', on 30 January 1622, and the following is an often quoted and characteristic passage:

> 'We have recorded, on historical evidence, that the most incorruptible republicans were austere and abstemious; but it is still a question whether they would not have exercised a more beneficial influence, and have been better men, if they had moistened their throats with Madeira, and enlarged their sympathies with grouse.'

Just as in *The Four Ages of Poetry*, there are criticism of the practices of the present day. These include the abandonment of the good old five o'clock dinner, and also the new French habit of hiding the roast behind a screen on a side-table, instead of being carved for all to see, And as for good beer:

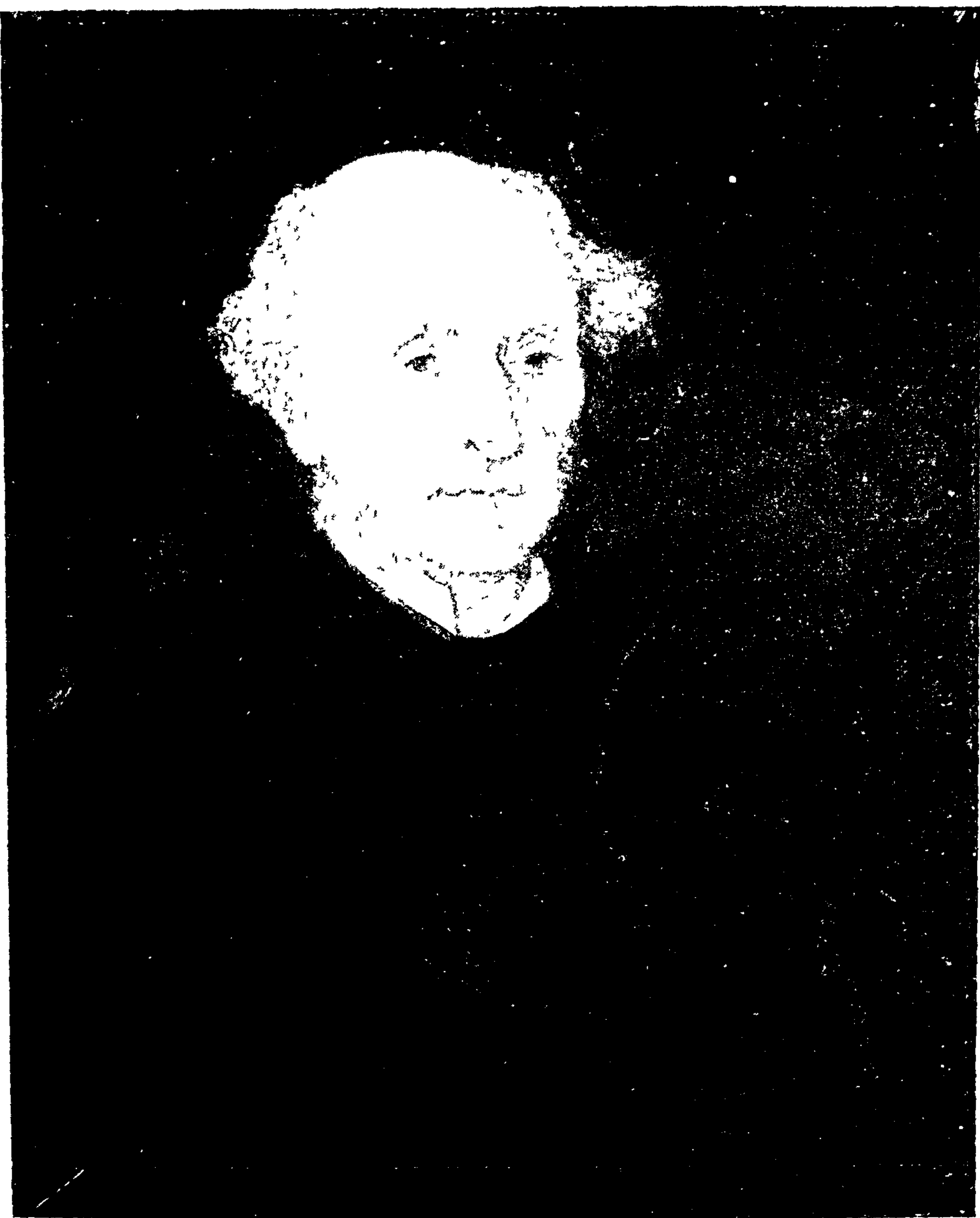
> 'Draught ale has vanished, and all the bottled compounds that go by that name are but unwholesome concoctions of drugs and camomile. We have brought chemistry into our kitchens, not as a handmaid, but as a poisoner.'

It is surely more likely that Peacock, rather than Mary Ellen, wrote that. And also:

> 'Despite philosophical panegyrics on plain living, practically very few even among philosophers really dislike a good dinner. Some, like poor Spinoza, prefer gruel, as the symbol of liberty, at home, to the grand repasts of others, which might have trespassed on his independence. Others, like Descartes, detected by a gay aristocrat in the act of discussing a savoury repast, will say, as he did, in answer to the Marquis's question, "What, do you philosophers eat dainties?" "Do you think God made good things only for fools?"'[7]

Collaboration on cookery books may have patched, but did not solve, the problems that now existed in Lower Halliford. From the first, Meredith had not been everybody's cup of tea. Edith Nicolls, at the age of five or six, had declared, roundly 'I don't like that man'. Hogg, perhaps a little jealous, referred to him as 'George the Fifth', and, because of his dyspepsia, as 'The Patient'. He soon began to get on Peacock's nerves. He smoked in the house, a habit which Peacock, with his fear of fire, found abhorrent. He paced about the room restlessly, he fidgeted with ornaments, and he hummed to himself (the effect, he once said, of his Welsh blood). According to Edith Nicolls, Peacock 'could not stand him'. They clashed on the subject of Germany and about Tennyson. In addition, there was friction between Meredith and Mary Ellen. Both had a temper, both had a sharp tongue, and they 'sharpened their wits against each other'.[8] What is more, Mary Ellen was, for the moment, the wage-earner. Meredith was out of pocket over his volume of poems. It was expected that he would accept the responsibility of some regular employment. There is a story that Peacock arranged an interview for him at East India House, and that Meredith refused to keep it. When Mary Ellen gave birth to a son, Arthur Gryffydh, in 1853, the bawling of the infant was the final straw, and Peacock moved them to Vine Cottage, on the other side of the green. There Meredith wrote his first novel, *The Shaving of Shagpat, an Arabian Entertainment*, an allegory about a little barber, Shili Bagarag, who sets out to fight the forces of evil. The public did not take to it and it was remaindered.

The worsening relations between Mary Ellen and Meredith were intensified by the fact that they looked such a handsome pair. Meredith was outstandingly good-looking. William Hollman Hunt has described Mary Ellen as a 'dashing young horsewoman who attracted much notice from the young "bloods" of the day'. Soon they were seldom together. The breaking-point came through the painter, Henry Wallis. In 1855 a picture of his was hung at the Royal Academy called 'Fireside Reverie'. The model was Mary Ellen, and Meredith contributed a four-line epigraph. To Wallis, two years younger than Meredith, Mary Ellen must have poured out her heart. In 1857 they were together in North Wales. In 1858,



10 John Stuart Mill Canvas by G F Watts



11 Peacock Canvas by Henry Wallis

at Clifton, Bristol, she bore his child and Meredith was registered as the father. That autumn, Mary Ellen and Wallis went to Capri. Meredith never got over it. He declared later that he had been tricked into the marriage, that 'Peacock's wife was mad', and that there was 'a taint in the family'. Retiring to lodgings in Chelsea, he wrote *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, the setting of which is the country between Shepperton and Chertsey.

Mary Ellen came back from Capri alone. Meredith refused to see her, or to let her see her son Arthur, until he heard that she was dying, and then only at the insistence of mutual friends. Peacock sent Mary Rosewall to look after her in Weybridge until her death of renal dropsy in 1861. It seems unlike Peacock not to have received her back. Olwen Campbell surmises that she was perhaps too proud and too humiliated to accept such an offer if indeed it was made. Before she died, she wrote to Hogg saying that she would like on her tombstone these lines by Tennyson:

> Come not, when I am dead,
> To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,
> To trample round my fallen head,
> And vex the unhappy dust thou would'st not save.

But she had another epitaph. Amongst Peacock's papers, after his death, was found one on which he had written:

To Mary Ellen, d. 1861

χθόνιος μεν ’Ερως ταχέως λήσμων
μνημμων ὀ δ’ ξπ’ οὐρανοῦ αἰεὶ

> Earthly love quickly forgets,
> But Heavenly love remembers always.

After the disaster, all contact ceased between Peacock and Meredith. We are thus left with a fascinating topic of literary criticism: how much did Meredith owe to his association with Peacock? This has been examined by Augustus Henry Able IIIrd, in a thesis for a Doctorate of Philosophy presented to the University of Pennsylvania in 1933. The first chapter provides some interesting quotations from little-known memoirs. For instance: 'He used to

declare that it was a great advantege to him in his youth to have been associated with Peacock, and that Peacock's writing had been a great model to him.'[9] But the main part of the thesis is taken up with detailed comparisons under various headings—Sentimentalism, The Dinner Table and Afterwards, Woman and so on. Naturally, when one begins working on these lines, a great many things begin to fall into place, and not everyone would go as far as Able does. But the fact remains that Meredith set out to be a poet, and while he was close to Peacock turned to writing comedy. There is also his constant use of the idea, so basic in Peacock's thought, of the therapeutic value of laughter. Uncle Hippias in *Richard Feveral* has obvious derivations, and Dr Middleton of *The Egoist* is as obviously based on Peacock himself. Able explores the similarities between Peacock's and Meredith's heroines, and raises the interesting possibility that Meredith may have known about some of Peacock's unpublished work, vor example *Ahrimanes*; and there is also the curious fact that in one of his last books, *One of our Conquerors*, he sees to borrow from Peacock's earliest one, in the 'comical trio' of Victor Radnor, Simeon Fenellan, and Colney Durance, with their 'bright view, and black view, and neutral view of life'. In *Sandra Belloni* there is an eccentric named Sir Twickenham Pryme, who thinks and speaks wholly in terms of figures, Cadwallader, Aneurin and Taliesin appear in chapter 28 of *The Angry Marriage.* And so on, and so on. Perhaps the case is pushed too far. What is quite certain is that, whatever Meredith owed to Peacock, he gave him little, if any credit—as in his famous lecture on *The Comic Spirit*.

Carl Dawson has made the point that Peacock seems never to have approved of his children's marriages. In the case of Mary Ellen and Meredith, he certainly did his best, and it has been suggested that, but for him, the break would have come much quicker. With his son, Edward, his relations seem to have been always a little distant, but Edward's wife and son, Arthur, were welcome at Lower Halliford, where the grandchild became the playmate of Edith Nicolls. Little is known about Rosa Jane, except that she married a Mr Collinson, lost two children, and died in 1857. Having scarcely known his father Peacock had no

example to guide him, and his absorption in his work, together with his wife's illness, must have given the children, at a vital period, a sense of insecurity against which they reacted by quick marriages. But Peacock had had excellent training in how to be a grandfather, and he proved to be a very good one.

In March, 1852, *Fraser's* published the first of Peacock's *Horae Dramaticae*, a series in which he proposed to reconstruct mutilated or fragmentary ancient Greek and Latin plays. The first was *Querolus or the Buried Treasure*, 'assignable to the age of Diocletian and Maximian', and 'the only Roman comedy which, in addition to the remains of Plautus and Terence, has escaped the ravages of time'. The Latin title is *Querolus, sive Aulularia*—that is, the comedy of the aula, or olla, a large covered pot or vessel. With this can be associated his unfinished fragment, *Julia Procula*, in which two needy lovers pray to their Lar and are miraculously rewarded with a pot of gold. Peacock may have reflected that such a magic dowry would well have suited Mary Ellen.

The second in the series, published in the following month, dealt with the *Phaethon* of Euripides, reclaimed from a Paris library aad already worked upon by Goethe.[10] Then there is a gap. The third did not appear till after his retirement in October 1857, when he explained that he 'had not had leisure to work out his design'. This one dealt with *The Flask*, which was produced by Cratinus at the age of ninety-seven, and which carried off the first prize against *The Clouds* of Aristophanes. Few lines of the play remain, but Peacock used it for a lively dissertation on drink and literary inspiration, in which he declared that even Aeschylus could never write a line when he was sober, a statement for which he quoted the authority of Athenaeus.[11] Martin Freeman says that it 'suggests the halloo of a schoolboy at the beginning of the summer holidays rather than the sigh of relief of a man who has just retired, at the age of seventy, from a busy and responsible position'. But the balance is adjusted at the end with a translated trochaic tetrameter from Epicharmus:

> Be sober, and not lightly credulous:
> These are the nerves and sinews of the mind.

Other articles in *Fraser's* were *Chapelle and Bachaumont* (April 1858): these were two gay young Frenchmen, born respectively in 1626 and 1624, whose account of a visit to drink the waters at Encausse was much admired by Voltaire; *Demetrius Galanus* (November 1858), an account of a Greek, born in 1760, who became a tutor in Calcutta and Benares and translated poems from the Sanskrit; and in March 1859 a review of the *History of Greek Literature*, begun by Müller and finished after his death by Donaldson. In the course of this he pressed once again the claims of Nonnus, 'the setting sun of Grecian literature'.

In March 1856 *Melincourt* was reprinted. In a preface Peacock commented, as he had done in his preface to the novels re-published in 1837, on the changes that had taken place meanwhile:

> 'Thirty-nine years ago, steam-boats were just coming into action, and the railway locomotive was not even thought of. Now everybody goes everywhere: going for the sake of going, and rejoicing in the rapidity with which they accomplish nothing.'

The art of enjoying life is in 'the regulation of the mind, not in 'the whisking about of the body'. He then says:

> 'Of the disputants whose opinions and public characters (for I never trespassed on private life) were shadowed in some of the persons of the story, almost all have passed from the diurnal scene. Many of the questions, discussed in the dialogues, have more of general than temporary application, and have still their advocates on both isdes: and new questions have arisen, which furnish abundant argument for similar conversations, and of which I may yet, perhaps, avail myself on some future occasion.'

The parenthesis in that passage is remarkable when one thinks back to *Nightmare Abbey*. The final words suggest that he had begun to think about *Gryll Grange*. But before that appeared, *Fraser's* published, in July 1858, the first of his *Memoirs of Shelley*. In it he reviewed Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, E. J. Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, and another book on Shelley by a Mr Middleton. He wrote with reluctance:

'I could have wished that, like Wordsworth's Cuckoo, he might have been allowed to remain a voice and a mystery: that like his own Skylark, he had been left unseen in his congenial region,

> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
> Which men call earth,

and that he had been heard only in the splendour of his song. But since it is not to be, since so much has, and so much more will probably be written about him, the motives which deterred me from originating a substantive work on the subject, do not restrict me from commenting on what has been published by others, and from correcting errors, if such should appear to me to occur, in the narratives which I may pass under review.'

But, as J. B. Priestley says, 'Having once set to work, he does more than that, indeed provides us with one of the most valuable and amusing accounts of Shelley we possess . . .'.

If Peacock disliked Hogg's book, so, for different reasons, did Lady Shelley. She withdrew material from Hogg and came out on her own with the *Shelley Memorials* and a collection of the letters from Italy. These Peacock reviewed in *Fraser's Magazine* for January and March 1860. The Shelley family were anxious to prove that Shelley had not 'forsaken Harriet for Mary merely because he liked Mary better', but only after 'an insanable breach with Harriet'. As we know, Peacock took the other view, which led to violent attacks by Ricahrd Garnett, for which Garnett afterwards expressed his regret, and to which Peacock replied in a *Supplementary Notice* in *Fraser's* two years later. In his introduction to the *Collected Novels*, David Garnett has stated that his grandfather's attacks were unjustified: 'Dr Leslie Hotson's discovery of Shelley's letters to Harriet, which were filed by the Westbrook family to deprive Shelley of the custory of his children, has . . . vindicated Peacock's reputation for loyal friendship and disinterested truthfulness'.

Peacock's attitude in this matter has been discussed in an earlier chapter,[12] but it should perhaps be pointed out in fairness that in his defence of Harriet Peacock has at one point leaned rather

heavily on the evidence. He quotes the second marriage, in an English church, as a sure sign that Shelley had no intention of leaving Harriet before he had met Mary Godwin. To the feminine mind of Olwen Campbell, it suggests just the opposite—that, seeing a split ahead, Shelley was making certain that Harriet would be properly treated by the Shelley family. Perhaps Peacock was indeed a little naive here. Shelley, too, had his moments of *naiveté*, but not where his family was concerned. He knew his Sir Timothy.

These questions may very well have been in Peacock's mind, when, at just about this time, he wrote his unfinished *Dialogue on Friendship after Marriage*. In this the following exchange occurs:

> AMARYLLIS: 'Married love should be one and indivisible. It should not be shared with another even under the most innocent semblance of affectionate friendship.'
>
> GALATEA: 'But if the husband or the wife does not complete the ideality of a sensitive or imaginative mind, may not so much as is wanting to complete it be admired, even loved, in another? There is in fact no divided feeling when the qualities found in the latter have no existence in the former.'

Peacock's preoccupation with Shelley at this time is also shown in his last novel, *Gryll Grange*, which, nearly thirty years after *Crotchet Castle*, began to appear in serial form in *Fraser's* in 1860.

Chapter Twenty-One

GRYLL GRANGE

Gryll Grange is an astonishing piece of work for a man of seventy-five. It has all the rich, mellow qualities one might expect; but also all the keen edge and liveliness of the earlier novels. Its opening quotation, from Samuel Butler, reminds one of *Headlong Hall*:

> Opinion governs all mankind,
> Like the blind leading of the blind . . .

But, like *Maid Marian*, it had a short prose preface as well: 'In the following pages, the New Forest is always mentioned as if it were still unenclosed. This is the only state in which the Author has been acquainted with it. Since its enclosure, he has never seen it, and purposes never to do so'.

This points to a remarkable thing about the book: it is written in two periods at once. It takes into account the world of 1860; but it also assumes the circumstances of forty years before. Dr Opimian is a amn of Peacock's own age But, in so far as the Mr Falconer of his story represents Shelley, it is the poet as he knew him. One of them has moved on through the years; the other, as if returning from some space-time continuum, is as he was in the old days.

There is another paragraph to the preface: 'The mottoes are sometimes specially apposit to the chapters to which they are prefixed; but more frequently to the general scope, or, to borrow a musical term, the *motivo* of the *operetta*'.

What, then, is this motivo? Let us look at the motto before chapter one: 'Always and everywhere I have so lived, that I might consume the passing light, as if it were not to return'.

These are the words attributed to Petronius Arbiter just before

his suicide at the order of Nero. The same idea is expressed throughout the novel:[1]

> Rejoice thy spirit: drink: the passing day
> Esteem thine own, and all beyond as Fortune's.
>
> (Euripides)
>
> Happy the man, and happy he alone,
> He who can call today his own:
> He who, secure within, can say,
> Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today. . . .
>
> (Horace, translated by Dryden)

Carpe Diem—live for the day—that is the *motivo*. But here is a curious thing: the man who chose these texts had taken, in his last years, to filling his study with pictures of St Catharine. He wrote about her in an unfinished story set in the Chiltern Hills He also writes about her in *Gryll Grange*. This shows the dangers of putting the label 'pagan', or, indeed, any other label on Peacock. Was Peacock a pagan, a radical, a Conservative? The answer, in each case, is one which I once heard Professor Joachim give in a lecture on Logic at Oxford. I have quite forgotten the question. 'The answer is "yes" with one reservation, which cuts so deep that it is better to give the answer "no".'

Now let us turn to chapter one of *Gryll Grange*. There is no setting of scene or character. We are plunged straight into dialogue: ' "Palestine soup!" said the Reverend Doctor Opimian, dining with his friend Squire Gryll, "a curiously complicated misnomer".'

So we are to have our country squire and our neighbouring parson, and the usual attention to the good things of the table. And before long we are treated to some typical observations on the contemporary world:

MR GRYLL: 'While we are on the subject of misnomers, what say you to the wisdom of Parliament?

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN· 'Why, sir, I do not call that a misnomer. The term wisdom is used in a parliamentary sense. The wisdom of Parliament is a wisdom *sui generis*. . . . It has achieved wonderful things by itself, and still more when Science has come to its

aid. Between them, they have poisoned the Thames, and killed the fish in the river. A little further development of the same wisdom and science will complete the poisoning of the air, and kill the dwellers on the banks.'

Miss Gryll, the Squire's niece, joins in the conversation which gets round to the current vogue of spirit-rapping. Why not, suggests Mr Gryll, write an Aristophanic comedy, in which the spirits of the past are invoked to appear and tell us what they think of the present day? It is agreed that here is an excellent idea for a Christmas entertainment.

Only now are we introduced to the characters. Gregory Gryll, Esq., of Gryll Grange, on the borders of the New Forest, 'held, though he found it difficult to trace the pedigree, that he was lineally descended from the ancient and illustrious Gryllus, who maintained against Ulysses the superior happiness of the life of other animals to that of the life of man'.[2]

Squire Gryll had never married—a wife presenting to him 'the forethought of a perturbation of his equanimity, which he could never being himself to encounter'. So, 'for the perpetuation of his name, he relied on an orphan niece, whom he had brought up from a child'. He had at first thought of calling her Circe, but 'had acquiesced in the name of a sister enchantress'—that is, Morgana, who appears in the Orlando *Innamorato* of Boiardo. It had been agreed between them that this beautiful and accomplished young lady should choose her own husband, subject to Squire Gryll's veto; but, so far, every suitor had been 'suddenly and summarily dismissed. Why, was the young lady's secret'.

The Reverend Doctor Opimian is named after a vintage Falernian wine.[3] In many ways, Peacock gives us here a self-portrait: 'His tastes in fact were four: a good library, a good dinner, a pleasant garden, and rural walks. He was an athlete in pedestrianism'. But Peacock has allotted him a blessing which was missing in his own life: a charming and domesticated wife. His conversations with her in the novel breathe happiness—as indeed does the Doctor's whole establishment:

'From the master and mistress to the cook, and from the cook to

the tom cat, there was about the inhabitants of the vicarage a sleek and purring rotundity of face and figure that denoted community of feelings, habits, and diet; each in its kind, of course, for the Doctor had his port, the cook her ale, and the cat his milk, in sufficiently liberal allowance.'

One fine Midsummer Day, the Doctor, with his Newfoundland dog at his heels, set out for 'one of his longest walks, such as he could only take in the longest days'. His destination was a solitary round tower on an eminence, now known as 'the Duke's Folly', though 'who the Duke in question was nobody could tell'. Arriving there, he found signs of recent habitation, and as he gazed about him a young gentleman approached, courteously invited him inside and took him up to his library, which was on the top floor of the tower with a fine view of the woods to the open sea. The young man's library was very like Peacock's own: a great array of classical literature; books in Italian and French, and a few in Spanish.[4] But the young man quoted a dictum of Porson, that 'Life is too short to learn German'.[5] Taking him now to the dining-room on the ground floor, the young man rang a bell. Two waiting-maids appeared, 'both pretty, and simply, but very becomingly, dressed', and offered hock and claret, both of which the Doctor pronounced excellent, and deliciously cool. The Doctor was surprised to learn that these maids were two of seven sisters, the eldest being about Mr Falconer's own age of twenty-six. Mr Falconer assured him that these young women, children of two old servants of his father and mother, lived there 'as they might do in the temple of Vesta'. Relating this at dinner to Mrs Opimian, the Doctor 'found her, as he had anticipated, most virtuously uncharitable' She had, she declared, 'no belief in the virtue of young men'. The Doctor replied that someone, he forgot who, had said that in everyone's life there is a page which is usually doubled down If there were one in the life of his young friend, he did not believe that the volume containing it would be in the same house with the seven sisters.

On his next visit the seven, all in the same dress of white and purple, sang him sacred music by Mozart and Beethoven and ended with a hymn to St Catharine. On another occasion, when he was

shown, in Falconer's room, an altar with an image of the Saint, and panels painted with scenes from her life, mostly copied from the Italian masters, Falconer told him the legend of St Catharine as the pictures showed it. She was a Princess of Alexandria in the third century. In a beatific vision the Saviour of the world placed a ring on her finger and called her his bride. The Emperor Maxentius attempted to put her to death 'by the wheel which bears her name':

'Four of these wheels, armed with iron teeth, and revolving towards each other, were to cut her to pieces. Angels broke the wheels. He then brought her to the stake, and the angels extinguished the flames. He then ordered her to be beheaded by the sword. This was permitted, and in the meantime the day had closed. The body, reserved for exposure to wild beasts, was left under guard at the place of execution. Intense darkness fell on the night, and in the morning the body had disappeared. The angles had borne it to the summit of the loftiest mountain of the Horeb range, where still a rock, bearing the form of a natural sarcophagus, meets the eye of the traveller. . . .'

What are we to make of Peacock's preoccupation with St Catharine, whose pictures he now looked at constantly in his own study? Perhaps the key lies in the subsequent conversation between Opimian and Falconer, in which it seems that Peacock is arguing with himself.

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN: 'Unquestionably the legend is interesting. At present, your faith is simply poetical. But take care, my young friend, that you do not finish by becoming the dupe of your own mystification.'

MR FALCONER: 'I have no fear of that. I think I can clearly distinguish devotion to ideal beauty from superstititious belief. I feel the necessity of some such devotion, to fill up the void which the world, as it is, leaves in my mind. I wish to believe in the presence of some local spiritual influence; genius or nymph; linking us by a medium of something like human feeling, but more pure and more exalted, to the all-pervading, creative, and preservative spirit of the universe; but I cannot realise it from

things as they are. Everything is too deeply tinged with sordid vulgarity. There can be no intellectual power evident in a wood, where the only inscription is not "Genio loci", but "Tresspassers will be prosecuted"; no Naiad in a stream that turns a cotton-mill; no Oread in a mountain-dell, where a railway train deposits a cargo of Vandals; no Nereids or Oceanitides along the seashore, where a coastguard is watching for smugglers. No; the intellectual life of the material world is dead. Imagination cannot replace it. But the intercession of saints still forms a link between the visible and the invisible. In their symbols I can imagine their presence....'

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN: 'I cannot object to your taste. But I hope you will not be led into investing the ideality with too much semblance of reality. I should be sorry to find you far gone in hagiology.'

Here we have that plurality which is Peacock arguing the thing out, as usual, with himself. There are echoes of passages from *Rhododaphne*; and also of that prose summary of *Ahrimanes*, in which he wrote of the genii of Oromazes visiting the world of men from his invisible island in the Southern Sea.

Returning now to the story: Opimian had told Miss Gryll about the young gentleman at the Duke's Folly, and had persuaded Falconer to co-operate in the preparation of the Aristophanic comedy. Furthermore, it had occurred to him that Falconer would make an excellent husband for Morgana Gryll. 'But', he mused, 'these seven damsels interpose themselves, like the sevenfold shield of Ajax.' Walking home one morning from a visit to Falconer, he had been on the point of abandoning the thankless office of match-making when he discovered a lovelorn young countryman, one Harry Hedgerow, pining because of continual rebuffs from one of the seven Vestals. Their names, he learnt, were Betsey, Catharine, Dorothy, Eleanor, Fanny, Grace and Anna. 'But they told me', said the swain, 'that it was not the alphabet they were christened from; it was the key of A Minor, if you know what that means.' The Doctor did indeed, and noted that Falconer's name, Algernon, would make the key-note of the octave. A grand design began to form in the Doctor's mind:

'If one of the damsels should marry, it would break the combination. One will not by herself. But what if seven apple-faced Hedgerows should propose simultaneously, seven notes in the key of A minor, an octave below? Stranger things have happened. . . .'

Peacock's problem now was, as in *Melincourt*, to arrange a meeting between his hero and heroine. Once again, a thunderstorm obliged. One day, Morgana and her uncle drove out in their coach to take a look at the 'Duke's Folly' and a flash of lightning struck one of their horses. Stunned by the flash, she was carried in to Falconer's abode, where a neighbouring doctor, by name Dr Anodyne—even Peacock's medicos have mellowed since the old days of Dr Killquick—prescribed several days' rest without being moved. However, on her return to the Grange, Opimian, observing that things were hanging fire, casually mentioned that there was a new visitor at the Grange, Lord Curryfin, who seemed to be in great favour with both uncle and niece. Jealousy being the test of love, reasoned the Doctor, 'a spice of it might not unfavorably be thrown in'. The recipe worked. In chapter twelve of the novel, we find Falconer a guest at Gryll Grange, watching unappreciatively as Lord Curryfin engages Morgana Gryll in conversation at the far end of the dinner-table. His irritation is heightened when he learns that Lord Curryfin has taken upon himself 'the office of architect, to superintend the construction of the theatre'.

There are other guests: Mr Minim, who is to compose the music; Mr Pallet, who is to paint the scenery; and also Miss Ilex and Mr MacBorrowdale. Miss Ilex reminds one of Mrs Evergreen in *Melnocurt*, though, unlike that lady, she has not spent her life hidden away in a village community, but has passed more than half of it in visits. She is 'everywhere welcome, being always good-humoured, agreeable in conversation, having much knowledge of society, good sense in matters of conduct, good taste, and knowledge in music'. Why then, has she never married? One day she takes Morgana into her confidence:

'I had several lovers; but my inner thoughts distinguished only one. . . . He was of a romantic turn of mind; he disliked and

avoided the ordinary pursuits of young men: he delighted in the society of accomplished young women, and in that alone. It was the single link between him and the world. He would disappear for weeks at a time, wandering in forests, climbing mountains, and descending into the dingles of mountain-streams, with no other companion than a Newfoundland dog; a large black dog, with a white breast, four white paws, and a white tip to his tail; a beautiful affectionate dog. I often patted him on the head, and fed him with my hand. . . .'

This is Peacock, at seventy, giving a picture of himself as a young man. But through whose eyes?

The other guest, Mr MacBorrowdale, is a Scot with a difference. Peacock's Scots, like his parsons and his doctors, have mellowed. Mr MacBorrowdale:

'. . . comprised in himself all that Scotland had ever been supposed to possess of mental, moral, and political philosophy; "And yet he bore it not about"; not "as being loth to wear it out", but because he held that there was a time for all things, and that dinner was a time for joviality, and not for argument.'

He even speaks of the teetotaller as 'the true Heautontimorumenos, the self-punisher, with a jug of toast and water for his Christmas wassail. . . . There is no tyrant like a thorough-paced reformer. I drink to his reformation.' When, at the same dinner-party, we find Opimian speaking of the 'fine old Scotch lilt' of 'The Campbells Are Coming' we realize that things have indeed quietened down on the border since the old days. These two gentlemen also agree on a matter near to Peacock's heart:

MR MACBORROWDALL: '. . . I detest and abominate the idea of a Siberian dinner, where you just look on fiddle-faddles, while your dinner is behind a screen, and you are served with rations like a pauper.'

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN: 'I quite agree with Mr MacBorrowdale. I like to see my dinner. . . .'

The new fashion is called Siberian because, when the meat does

arrive from behind the screen, it is always cold. Now the ladies retire, and the conversation turns to the forthcoming Aristophanic comedy, and so to the music and painting of the ancient Greeks.

MR MINIM: '. . . They seem to have had only the minor Key, and to have known no more of counterpoint than they did of perspective.'

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN: 'Their system of painting did not require perspective. Their main subject was on one foreground. Buildings, rocks, trees, served simply to indicate, not to delineate, the scene.'

Falconer then chips in with a defence of ancient Greek music that goes to the root of the inaccurate system of tuning (which we nowadays accept without realizing its complications) of the 'Well-tempered Keyboard':

MR FALCONER: 'Their scales were in true intervals; they had really major and minor tones; we have neither, but a confusion of both. They had both sharps and flats: we have neither, but a mere set of semitones which serve for both. In their enharmonic scale the fineness of their ear perceived distinctions, which are lost on the coarseness of ours.'

MacBorrowdale switches the conversation to Jack of Dover, 'a man who travelled in search of a greater fool than himself, and did not find him'. This gives Opimian his cue to state one or two of his pet aversions:

THE REV. DR OPIMIAN: 'He must have lived in odd times. In our days he would not have gone far without falling in with a teetotaller, or a decimal coinage man, or a school-for-all-man, or a competitive examination man, who would not allow a drayman to lower a barrel into a cellar unless he could expound the mathematical principles by which he performed the operation.'

It was during this same evening at Gryll Grange that a young lady sang the ballad called 'Love and Age'. This, with its muted autobiographical tones, has been mentioned more than once before. Here it is in full:

LOVE AND AGE

I played with you 'mid cowslips blowing,
When I was six and you were four;
When garlands weaving, flower-bells throwing,
Were pleasure soon to please no more.
Through groves and meads, o'er grass and heather,
With little playmates, to and fro,
We wandered hand in hand together;
But that was sixty years ago.

You grew a lovely roseate maiden,
And still our early love was strong;
Still with no care our days were laden,
They glided joyously along;
And I did love you, very dearly,
How dearly words want power to show;
I thought your heart was touched as nearly;
But that was fifty years ago.

Then other lovers came around you,
Your beauty grew from year to year,
And many a splendid circle found you
The centre of its glittering sphere.
I saw you then, first vows forsaking,
On rank and health your hand bestow;
Oh, then I thought my heart was breaking,—
But that was forty years ago.

And I lived on, to wed another:
No cause she gave me to repine;
And when I heard you were a mother,
I did not wish the children mine.
My own young flock, in fair progression,
Made up a pleasant Christian row:
My joy in them was past expression;—
But that was thirty years ago.

You grew a matron plump and comely,
You dwelt in fashion's brightest blaze;
My earthly lot was far more homely;
But I too had my festal days.
No merrier eyes have ever glistened
Arojnd the hearth-stone's wintry glow,
Than when my youngest child was christened:—
But that was twenty years ago.

Time passed. My eldest girl was married,
And I am now a grandsire grey;
One pet of four years old I've carried
Among the wild-flowered meads to play.
In our old fields of childish pleasure,
Where now, as then, the cowslips blow,
She fills her basket's ample measure,—
And that is not ten years ago.

But though first love's impassioned blindness
Has passed away in colder light,
I still have thought of you with kindness,
And shall do, till our last goodnight.
The ever-rolling silent hours
Will bring a time we shall not know,
When our young days of gathering flowers
Will be an hundred years ago.

As the song is sung, Lord Curryfin observes that the singer is a beautiful young lady. Opimian is able to inform him that she is Miss Niphet, 'the only daugher of a gentleman of fortune, a few miles distant, '. . . 'a person of very deep feeling, which she does not choose should appear on the surface'.[6] It is at this point that *Gryll Grange* shows its structural superiority to *Melincourt*. Instead of a contrived abduction and dilatory pursuit, we are treated to an intricate counterpoint. Curryfin, like Scythrop, is torn between two ... ontemplates whether 'he can ... on either ... ilemma'. Falconer loves Mi ... ield

back by his seven Vestal virgins. Miss Gryll parries the approaches of Lord Curryfin while awaiting those of Falconer. This complex situation is sustained by a flow of good talk, and by the remarkable and impulsive behaviour of Curryfin.

This engaging young man is an amalgam of Squire Headlong, Mr Cranium, and Sir Telegraph Paxarett. He is an ardent lecturer on fish, and has attempted, with some courage, to expound this subject to audiences of fishermen at water-resorts. He has also 'invented a new sail of infallible safety, which resulted, like most similar inventions, in capsizing the inventor on its first trial'. One afternoon, Miss Niphet found him emerging from the lake, 'dripping like a Triton in trousers'.[7] On another occasion she witnessed his more successful attempts to remain seated on a wild stallion. And when the frosty season arrived she saw him risking his neck by cutting figures of 898 on the ice. This daredevilry aroused a maternal sense in Miss Niphet, who extorted from him a promise not to do these things again, nor to go balooning. Curryfin also has something of Beachcomber's Dr Strabismus about him. In his capacity as architect of the Athenian theatre for the Aristophanic comedy, he experimented with the *echeîa*, or sonorous vases, used by the ancients to improve their acoustics. The result was:

> '. . . a resonance, like the sound produced by sea-shells when placed against the ear, only many times multiplied, and growing like the sound of a gong: it was the exaggerated concentration of a symphony of a lime-grove, full of cockchaffers, on a fine evening in early summer.'[8]

Without the *echeîa*, the acoustics of the theatre were admirable. It was used, as Christmas approached, for a series of lectures. Curryfin on fish is lost to posterity; but Opimian's contribution, in the form of a poem, is an unexpectedly bitter satire.[9] It is called 'A New Order of Chivalry'. Here are some of its verses:

> By your majesty's grace we have risen up Knights,
> But we feel little relish for frays and for fights:
> There are heroes enough, full of spirit and fire,
> Always ready to shoot and be shot at for hire. . . .

With two nations in arms, friends impartial to both,
To raise each a loan we shall be nothing loth;
We will lend them the pay, to fit men for the fray:
But shall keep ourselves carefully out of the way. . . .

'Twixt Saint George and the Dragon, we settle it thus:
Which has scrip above par, is the Hero for us:
For a turn in the market, the Dragon's red gorge
Shall have our free welcome to swallow Saint George.

Generally, Opimian is in gentler mood, though no less effective for that, nor less up-to-date. One could make an excellent bedside book of his *Pensées*. For example:

'Science is one thing, and wisdom is another. Science is an edged tool, with which men play like children, and cut their fingers. . . . See how much belongs to the word Explosion alone, of which the ancients knew nothing. . . . See the complications and refinements of modes of destruction, in revolvers and rifles and shells and rockets and cannon. See collisions and wrecks and every mode of disaster by land and by sea, resulting chiefly from the insanity for speed, in those who for the most part have nothing to do at the end of the race. . . . The day would fail, if I should attempt to enumerate the evils which science has inflicted on mankind. I almost think it is the destiny of science to exterminate the human race.'

Another subject on which Opimian feels strongly is that of competitive examinations. He has seen papers, he says, which would 'infallibly have excluded Marlborough from the army and Nelson from the Navy'. Naturally enough, Opimian's ideas find expression when the Aristophanic comedy is presented on the fifth day of Christmas. Gryllus, summoned by spirit-rappers from the past, is amazed to see 'long trains of strange machines on wheels'.

SPIRIT-RAPPER: 'This is one of the great glories of our modern time. "Men are become as birds", and skim like swallows the surface of the world.'

GRYLLUS: 'To what good end?'

SPIRIT-RAPPER: 'The end is in itself—the end of skimming the surface of the world.'

GRYLLUS: 'If that be all,
I had rather sit in peace in my old home.'

The group of spirit-rappers are juxtaposed across the stage by a chorus of competitive examiners. When these turn down Richard Coeur-de-Leon for military duty, he upsets their table for them. The spirit-rappers fare even worse. A sound is heard like thunder: it is Jupiter laughing in mockery and anger at their presumption. Then, according to Peacock's stage direction: 'The table turned slowly, and by degrees went on spinning with accelerated speed. The arms of the chairs put forth hands, and pinched the spirit-rappers, who sprang up and ran off, pursued by their chairs.'

Peacock urbanely remarks that this piece of mechanical pantomime afforded Curryfin 'ample satisfaction for the failure of his resonant vases'. In point of fact, Peacock is clearly enjoying himself on the side by writing a totally unactable stage-play. The physical limitations of the stage had never appealed to him.

Over the Christmas period, the plot of the story has been held in a state of suspense. Harry Hedgerow had mobilized his seven bridegrooms for the seven Vestals. But meanwhile, Morgana had become increasingly like her namesake in Boiardo's poem. Before Christmas she had summoned Falconer to her presence and laid on him an interdict: that he must listen to her in silence, say not a syllable in reply, and not return to the subject for four times seven days. His agreement obtained, she continued:

MORGANA: 'Then you may say, I have fallen in love; very irrationally—(*he was about to exclaim, but she placed her finger on his lips*)—very irrationally; but I cannot help it I fear I must yield to my destiny. I will try to free myself of all obstacles; I will, if I can, offer my hand, where I have given my heart. And this I will do, if I ever do, at the end of four times seven days; if not then, never.'

Similarly, Curryfin had been commanded, as if in chains, to deliver

himself as a suppliant to Miss Niphet. It would seem that Peacock's acquaintance with Morgana through Boiardo had revived memories of Lucretia Oldham of Shacklewell Green.

The climax of the novel is carried off with great panache—a ninefold wedding: Falconer and Morgana; Curryfin and Miss Niphet, and Harry Hedgerow's team of seven lined up with the Vestals. For good measure, there is in chapter 34 a splendid collection of ghost stories. Occasionally a cloud passes. Marriage, Opimian has told us, is a lottery: and when the multiple wedding crowns his story, Peacock warns us: 'It was the dissipation of a dream too much above mortal frailty, too much above the contingencies of chance and change, to be permanently realized'.

But, like Oliver Goldsmith in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, he does not deny his characters the happiness that, in his own life, had passed him by. An address to the wedding guests by Doctor Opimian may be received, says Peacock, 'as the epilogue of our comedy':

> 'Most earnestly do I hope that the promise of their marriage morning may be fulfilled in its noon and sunset: and when I add, may they all be as happy in their partners as I have been, I say what all who know the excellent person beside me will feel to be the best good wish in my power to bestow. And now, to the health of the brides and bridegrooms, in bumpers of champagne. Let all the attendants stand by, each with a fresh bottle, with only one uncut string. Let all the corks, when I give the signal, be discharged simultaneously; and we will receive it as a piece of Bacchic ordnance, in honour of the Power of the Joyful Event, whom we may assume to be presiding on this auspicious occasion.'

Thus, with a Christian occasion, a fusillade of champagne-corks, and the invocation of a Pagan deity, Peacock closes the page of his last, exuberant, enigmatic novel.

Forty-five years separate *Gryll Grange* and *Headlong Hall*. The framework is the same. It was not new when he found it, and it has been imitated since. W. H. Mallock acknowledged his debt to Peacock in *The New Republic*, and the influence is apparent in

Richard Garnett's *The Twilight of the Gods*. There are obvious affinities with some of the early Aldous Huxley novels—*Crome Yellow*, for instance—and there is a fine gathering of crotcheteers in the first act of Bernard Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. The play of opinion is the basis of Galsworthy's *Loyalties*, though nobody could accuse that dramatist of inheriting Peacock's lightness of touch. There is also a curious echo of *Melincourt* in *The Ragged-trousered Philanthropists*,[10] and some of his eccentrics seem to have found their way into the columns of Beachcomber in the *Daily Express*. But there has never been another Peacock. As Oliver Elton put it:

> 'The art of satire, in his hands, resolved itself into a kind of cookery; almost, indeed, into the concoction of a simple dish, with much the same ingredients, which the *chef* spends fifteen years in garnishing and making perfect; which is named after him, and copied by others, but of which the open secret dies with him.'[11]

Chapter Twenty-Two

THE INDIAN SUMMER

There is a pleasant story that a young man, boating on the Thames, said to his companion: 'This must be old Peacock's place'. A fine head of white hair popped up on the other side of a hedge and declared: 'It is—and this is old Peacock!'

We see him in many moods in his last few years. There are bitter flashes of irony, as when Opimian says that the greatest blessing of old age is to have a daughter. But in *Gryll Grange*, too, there is the quotation from Scribe's *La Vieille*: '*quand vous verrez la veiellesse douce, facile et tolérante, vous pourrcz dire eomme Fontenelle: L'amour à passé par-là.*'

These were the words that came to Robert Buchanan's mind when, as related in the first chapter, he made his pilgrimage to Lower Halliford and found Peacock teaching Italian to the little girl on the sunlit lawn. Another picture is given us by Edith Nicolls, who was in her mid-teens when *Gryll Grange* appeared:

> 'As he advanced in years, his detestation of anything disagreeable made him simply avoid whatever fretted him, laughing off all sorts of ordinary calls upon his leisure time. His love of ease and kindness of heart made it impossible that he could be actively unkind to anyone, but he would not be worried, and just got away from anything that annoyed him. He was very fond of his children, and was an indulgent father to them, and he was a kind and affectionate grandfather; but he could not bear any one to be unhappy or uncomfortable about him, and this feeling he carried down to the animal creation, his pet cats and dogs were especially cared for by himself, the birds in the garden were carefully watched over and fed, and no gun was ever allowed to be fired about the place.'

Once he retired, it was very difficult to lure him back to London.[1] Like Opimian, he spent his time in his library, in his garden, or on the river (in his case). Edith Nicolls also gives us this charming picture:

'May-day he always kept in true old English fashion; all the children of the village came round with their garlands of flowers, and each child was presented with a new penny, or silver threepenny or fourpenny piece, according to the beauty of their garlands; the money was given by the Queen of the May, always one of his granddaughters, who sat beside him, dressed in white and crowned with flowers, and holding a sceptre of flowers in her hand. He loved to keep up these old English customs.'

We also hear of Peacock animatedly supervising the running of the household and the buying of provisions. But when he was in his library he was not to be disturbed. Edith Nicolls was one of the few who were allowed to visit him there, and once, when she ushered in Thackeray unannounced, he received his guest courteously, but scolded his grand-daughter afterwards. Peacock, in these last years, did more than 'fleet the time carelessly'. He regularly began his reading at five in the morning, and during these last years, so Buchanan tells us, he was learning Spanish. It has been pointed out that, in the catalogue of his library[2] there were few Spanish books; but this is not surprising. Peacock was a cautious man; he would not buy books before he could read them, just as, in his first days at East India House, he did not fix permanent accommodation until he was certain of the job. This catalogue contains few surprises, except the remarkable number of novels by Paul de Kock.

Buchanan speaks of Peacock's other literary preferences: Molière, Voltaire, the Restoration dramatists, and Robert Burns ('Tam o' Shanter', it seems, was a great favourite). He also mentions Peacock's enjoyment of Dickens: *Pickwick Papers* delighted him, and *Our Mutual Friend* was his favourite. He also comments on his hatred of tobacco, which, he feels, arose from his 'morbid fear of fire'. 'He would never have any lucifer matches in the house, save one or two which were kept jealously in a tin box in the kitchen'. By a terrible

irony, fire did break out, in his own bedroom, and the shock of it hastened his death.

Buchanan gives us a few more glimpses, some of them tantalizing, of those last few years. He remarks that, in private conversation, Peacock talked much more freely about Shelley than he had been prepared to do in the *Memoirs*. He also says that it must be confessed that Peacock's mind was a 'terrible *thesaurus eroticus*'. Some people have tried to see in this a suggestion that he had a private collection of pornographic books, as did Lord Houghton, and that this was why he refused to leave his library when the fire broke out. Surely, this is to take Buchanan's remark too far. Undoubtedly Peacock knew ancient Latin and Greek well, and to know a language well is to know its *double entendres*. Aristophanes would be unintelligible without it. There is a peculiar satisfaction in knowing such things as that the word *ἱππόπορνος* can mean either a harlot on horseback or an outsize harlot (as in horse-chestnut). We can be sure that when Peacock and Macaulay 'tried each other' on ancient authors, a few things came out which were not for ladies' ears. As Carl Dawson says, it is more than likely that Peacock occasionally teased his solemn Scottish friend with a little gentle leg-pulling. It would have been interesting also to know more of Peacock's correspondence with Lord Broughton. Buchanan tells us:

> 'The two old gentlemen interchanged letters and verse, and capped quotations, and doubtless felt like two antediluvian mammoths left stranded and yet living after the Deluge—that Deluge being typified to them by the submersion of Whig and Tory in one wild wave of progress, and by the long career of Lord Brougham as a sort of political Noah.'

Unfortunately, when, after Peacock's death, Edith Nicolls returned to Lord Broughton his letters to Peacock, she did not think to ask for Peacock's letters to him in exchange. Here is part of one (undated) which she gives in her *Biographical Notice*:

> 'The last winter made fearful havoc among my few friends of my own generation, and among some of the generations below me. I am sorry to think you had cause to say the same. Yesterday you

attended your old friend's funeral. Soldiers who "follow their dead comrade to the grave" march slowly to solemn music, but they return in quick time to the liveliest measure the band can play. The last duty has been paid to the dead. What remains belongs to the living.'

Peacock's friendship with Thackeray, begun at Erle Stoke, continued through these years, though here again our information is scanty. But what has proved of enormous value is his correspondence with the Belfast solicitor, Thomas L'Estrange. In one of these letters, preserved by Cole, he gives a valuable list of his writings from 1830 to 1860. In another, as we have seen, he identifies the Dingle of *Crotchet Castle*.[3] In another, he writes:

'I have thought of a new work, which I shall proabably commence when the time returns for lighting fires, and about the same time I shall again think of my "Collection of Miscellanies". In the questions which have come within my scope, I have endeavoured to be impartial, and to say what could be said on both sides. . . . If I have not done so, it is because I could find nothing to say in behalf of some specific propositions, as in *Gryll Grange*, p. 171.'

This refers to his views on competitive examinations, on which we have already heard Dr Opimian's views in *Gryll Grange*. The same letter gives us an interesting light on his political opinions—or non-opinions:

'If I have said lately nothing about the Tories, it arises from my considering them to be as extinct as the Mammoth. Their successors, the Conservatives, as they call themselves, appear to me like Falstaff's otter, "neither fish nor flesh", one knows not where to have them. I could not, in a dialogue, put into the mouth of one of them the affirmation of any principle which I should expect him to adhere to for five minutes.'

This illustrates, again, the difficulty of putting any kind of a label on Peacock's thought. J. B. Priestley enjoys himself by summing up Peacock's political sentiments as '. . . those of an aristocratic individualistic republican Radical with a strong Tory

bias, whose good pleasure it was to be always against the government'. For, to Peacock, says Priestley,

> 'Government, probably power itself, is incongruous and droll. It is incongruous because, notwithstanding our pretensions, it is nothing but a superior might. It is droll, because it is always more and more artfully disguising itself as right. How absurd it is that rational beings cannot contrive anything better! How ridiculous they are when they pretend, in spite of the facts, that they are contriving something better! That is really Peacock's attitude.'

As Clive Bell observed, Peacock's standards are such that any system of government, past, present or future, would find it difficult to stand up to them. Priestley called him a 'baffled idealist', and that really sums the matter up.

In a letter to L'Estrange there is a reference to a possible collection of reminiscences. One of these, not published in his lifetime, was *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*. It is a remarkable piece of writing. Carl Dawson has called it his prose 'Newark Abbey'. It will be remembered that, through a loophole in the law, a self-styled Robin Hood was able to continue to kill deer in Windsor Forest. Eventually, three squadrons of cavalry were brought in to drive the deer out of the Forest into the Park. The operation was secret, but Peacock heard of it 'from a friend at court' and watched:

> 'My position was on a rising ground, covered with trees, and overlooking an extensive glade. The park was on my left hand: the main part of the forest on the right and before me. A wide extent of the park paling had been removed, and rope fencing had been carried to a great length, at oblique angles from the opening. It was a clear calm sunny day, and for a time there was profound silence. This was first broken by the faint sound of bugles, answering each other's signals from remote points in the distance: drawing nearer by degrees, and growing progressively loud. Then came two or three straggling deer, bounding from the trees, and flying through the opening of the park pales. Then came greater numbers, and ultimately congregated herds: the beatings

of their multitudinous feet mingled with the trampling of the yet unseen horses, and the full sounds of the bugles. Last appeared the cavalry, issuing from the woods, and ranging themselves in a semi-circle, from horn to horn of the rope fencing. The open space was filled with deer, terrified by the chace, confused by their own numbers, and rushing in all directions: the greater part though the park opening: many trying to leap the rope fencing, in which a few were hurt, and one or two succeeded: escaping to their old haunts, most probably to furnish Robin Hood with his last venison feast. By degrees, the mass grew thinner: at last, all had disappeared: the rope fencing shut up the park for the night: the cavalry rode off towards Windsor: and all again was silent.

'This was, without any exception, the most beautiful sight I ever witnessed: but I saw it with deep regret: for, with the expulsion of the deer, the life of the old scenes was gone, and I have always looked back on that day, as the last day of Windsor Forest.'

At about this time he began an unfinished fragment called *Cotswold Chace*, mainly remarkable for another description of the lady in the blue gown and the black hat with the black feather whom we have met already. Another piece of this time, *Boozabowt Abbey*, recaptures the old world of 'moynerie'.[4] It has some fine moments of slapstick, but also its more serious ones, as when the abbot asks one of the brothers:

> '. . . What is this new riddle of yours, which seems to be nonsense, about walls surviving their foundation?'
> 'Their foundation is faith', said Brother John. 'The walls will be standing when the faith has departed. . . .
> '. . . I have seen Pagan temples become Christian Churches, and Christian churches become Mahometan mosques. That which has been is that which shall be. There is nothing new under the sun.'

This line of speculation does not please the Abbot, who tells Brother John abruptly to look to his charge, 'which is the cellar'. It would seem, though, that Peacock intended, had he pursued with the story, to allow these latter-day monks a little more liberality of discussion and less knockabout than their predecessors.

Peacock's last published volume appeared in 1862. The main

piece was a translation of an Italian play, *Gio Ingannati*, which was performed in Siena in 1531, and which Peacock believed to be the origin of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. But with it he offered an explanation of the famous classical enigma (referred to by Dr Opimian in *Gryll Grange*) which, Peacock tells us, was found on a marble in Bologna, some two hundred years before he was writing:

AELIA LAELIA CRISPIS

D.M.
Aelia . Laelia . Crispis.
Nec . Vir . Nec . Mulier . Nec . Androgyna.
Nec . Puella . Nec . Juvenis . Nec . Anus.
Nec . Casta . Nec . Meretrix . Nec . Pudica.
Sed . Omnia .
Sublata .
Neque . Fame . Neque . Ferro . Neque . Veneno.
Sed . Omnibus .
Nec . Coelo . Nec . Aquis . Nec . Terris .
Sed . Ubique . Jacet .
Lucius . Agatho . Priscus .
Nec . Maritus . Nec . Amator . Nec Necessarius.
Neque . Moerens . Neque . Gaudens . Neque . Flens .
Hanc . Nec . Molem . Nec . Pyramidem .
Nec . Sepulchrum .
Sed . Omnia .
Scit . Et . Nescit .
Cui . Posuerit.

TO THE GODS OF THE DEAD

Aelia Laelia Crispis,
Not man, nor woman, nor hermaphrodite:
Not girl, nor youth, nor old woman:
Not chaste, nor unchaste, nor modest:
But all:
Carried off,
Not by hunger, nor by sword, nor by poison:

But by all:
Lies,
Not in air, not in earth, not in the waters:
But everywhere.
Lucius Agatho Priscus,
Not her husband, not her lover, nor her friend:
Not sorrowing, nor rejoicing, nor weeping:
Erecting
This, not a stone-pile, nor a pyramid,
Nor a sepulchre:
But all:
Knows, and knows not,
To whom he erects it.

Peacock wrote:

'I believe this enigma to consist entirely in the contrast, between the general and particular consideration of the human body, and its accidents of birth and burial. Abstracting from it all but what is common to all human bodies, it has neither age nor sex; it has no morals, good or bad: it does from no specific cause; lies in no specific place: is the subject of neither joy nor grief to the survivor, who superintends its funeral: has no specific monument erected over it: is, in short, the abstraction contemplated in the one formula: "Man that is born of woman"; which the priest pronounces equally over the new-born babe, the mature man or woman, and the oldest of the old.'[5]

There are also two short poems which would seem to date from these last years. One is called 'Castles in the Air':

My thoughts by night are often filled
With vision's false as fair:
For in the past alone I build
My castles in the air.

I dwell not now on what may be:
Night shadows o'er the scene:
But still my fancy wanders feee
Through that which might have been.

The other consists of only four lines; but it has been remarked that in that compass he said all that he had to say years before, in the four books of *The Philosophy of Melancholy*:

> The briefest part of life's uncertain day,
> Youth's lovely blossom, hastes to swift decay:
> While love, wine, song, enhance our gayest mood
> Old Age creeps on, nor thought, nor understood.

There were one or two friends who kept in touch with Peacock during these last years: Lord Houghton and his family, Harriet Love, now living in the Isle of Wight, and we hear from Edith Nicholls of a 'very old friend', Mrs Jenkins, and a Mr Thomas James Arnold. He also enjoyed the company of his grandchildren, including Edith Nicolls herself. The adopted daughter, Mary Rosewall, or May, as she was now affectionately called, who had come into the family as a child of three on the death of Margaret, was with him to the end. She was, says Edith Nicolls, a tender and devoted nurse. She had never married. It was she who went to do what she could for Mary Ellen. She became his sole executrix,[6] and when he died she went quietly back to live with her father and mother at Walton Bridge.

Gradually the fine old man began to falter. He suffered from intestinal cramps. Serious study tired him. Says Edith Nicolls:

> 'Towards the end of his life, he grew much depressed in spirits . . . and a very short time before his death he was greatly shaken by a fire breaking out in the roof of his bedroom. He was taken to the library, which, being at the other end of the house, was away from the danger and water. At one time it was feared that the fire was gaining ground, and that it would be needful to move him into some one of the other houses in the neighbourhood. . . . The curate who came to ask my grandfather to take shelter in his house, received a rough and rather startling reception, for in answer to the invitation, he exclaimed, "By all the gods, I will not move"!'

The shock was too much. He retired to his bedroom and remained there till his death. It was during these last days that he began to

dream of Fanny Falkner. Many years before he had written: 'Some of us believe in the verity of dreams'.[7] As he confided to Edith Nicolls, they now gave him great happiness. She ends her *Biographical Notice*:

> 'My grandfather died on the 23rd of January, 1866, and is buried in the New Cemetery, at Sheppetton, close to his daugher Rosa; his mother and his infant daugher, Margaret, lie in the old churchyard, but that has long been closed. His grave is marked by a stone, with only his name and the date of his birth and death inscribed on it, which was placed there by his cousins, Henry and Harriet Love, and chosen in accordance with his own taste, merely to indicate where he was laid.'

'Whence is the stream of Time?' That is how Peacock started an undated poem, gazing no doubt at his River Thames, which he had tracked to its source, but which remained a mystery. One is reminded of Albert Schweitzer's simile, already quoted, of the warm Gulf Stream flowing through ice-cold banks of its own element.[8] For Schweitzer this was the Christian faith. Peacock, who lost his earlier orthodoxy sometime between 1806 and 1812, when he revised the ending of *Palmyra*, went to his grave with his question unanswered. He gets nearest to revealing his agnostic but by no means atheistic position in his review of Thomas Moore's *Epicurean*.

Mayoux called his book on Peacock *An English Epicurean*, not *An English Hedonist*. Peacock was self-indulgent (though not as much as his novels would suggest). But, as Olwen Campbell says, he was also indulgent to others. He believed in duty and in being of use to other people. The influence of Jeremy Bentham on Peacock is a subject to be explored further. He took nothing for granted. He worked, as I heard Professor Bondi say of the modern physicist, 'not by proof, but by disproof'. As Mayoux said, he believed there was some truth in everything; but he also believed in testing everything by reason and ridicule.

In Carl Dawson's phrase, there has been more than one 'effort to misunderstand Peacock'.[9] But many people have written preceptively about him, and it is a measure of his fascination that he

has appeared so differently to different people. The short accounts by J. B. Priestley and Olwen W. Campbell, both admirable in themselves, have an additional value in the way they complement each other. Perhaps in a way Peacock was writing his own epitaph, when, at the heading of a chapter of *Gryll Grange*, he quotes a fragment of Alexis:[10]

As men who leave their homes for public games,
We leave our native element of darkness
For life's bright light. And, who has most of mirth,
And wine, and love, may, like a satisfied guest,
Return contented to the night he sprang from.

And yet, as we have seen, that was not for Peacock the whole answer. Of all that I have read about him in preparing this volume, one sentence has kept recurring to me. It is what J. J. Mayoux wrote about him, when Shelley had compared himself to Byron's 'wanderer o'er Eternity'. I would like to end my own account of Thomas Love Peacock by quoting it again:[11]

Peacock n'est pas un vagabonde de l'éternité; sa barque n'a jamais glissé qu'entre les deux rives vertes de la Tamise, mais il s'est peut être plus souvent qu'on ne pense penché sur le bordage pour contempler dans l'eau d'étranges reflets.

K

Notes and References

H.	Halliford Edition
C.D.	Carl Dawson, *His Fine Wit*
K.N.C.	Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley and His Circle*

INTRODUCTION

1. Sir Henry Cole, CB, was a distinguished administrator in public works and a patron of the arts. His meeting with Peacock in the 1820s is related in chapter 12. Before the 1875 edition he had written a *Biographical Note* of which ten copies were privately printed.

   Lord Houghton, formerly Richard Monckton Milnes, was at Cambridge with Tennyson. His home, Fryston Hall in Yorkshire, was a meeting place for literary and political celebrities. George Meredith went there with Swinburne in 1866, and, perhaps not getting centre stage, declared it very dull. It is important to keep the lines clear between Lords Houghton, Broughton (Peacock's close friend) and Brougham (his *bête noire*).

   Edith Nicolls was the daughter of Mary Ellen Peacock by her first husband, Lieutenant Edward Nicolls, who was drowned shortly after the marriage. (Chapter 19.)
2. The L'Estrange–Peacock correspondence, a most valuable contemporary source, has been edited by H. L. B. Brett-Smith.
3. This definitive edition of Peacock's works took ten years to complete. For details see the bibliography. There is a substantial though rather colourless biographical introduction in the first volume.
4. Mayoux has also edited *Nightmare Abbey* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* in a French–English version.
5. This aspect of Peacock, and the monograph upon it by Miss Paulina June Salz (one of the many excellent pieces of American research into Peacock) are discussed in chapter 16.
6. Shelley's lines, from a letter of July 1820 to Maria Gisborne, immediately follow his comments on Peacock's marriage quoted in chapter 14.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Paraphrased and quoted from Robert Buchanan, *A Look Round Literature*, Ward and Downing, 1881. See also Harriet Jay, *Robert Buchanan*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1903.
2. Professor Saintsbury's text of the novels has been superseded by the Halliford edition. But the comments in his introductions of which this is an example, have a charm of their own.
3. This phrase of Fontenelle's occurs in a passage from Scribe's *La Vieille*, with which Peacock heads chapter 27 of *Gryll Grange*.

4. This motif also occurs in *Gryll Grange*, where Mr Falconer tells the story of the martyr. It also occurs in the unfinished fragment, *A Story of a Mansion Among the Chiltern Hills*.
5 *Evening Standard*, 1 January 1971.
6. ibid, 21 May 1971. Ogden Nash mentioned a further difficulty which did not afflict Peacock—that Thurber was always standing over his shoulder.
7 Mais Henri s'avancait à sa grandeur suprême
Par des chemins cachés, inconnus à lui-même.

David Cecil says that Lord Melbourne copied these lines of Voltaire into his common-place book in 1833, the year before he became Prime Minister. (See p 3 of his *Lord Melbourne*.)
8. Richard Garnett, in his introduction to *Headlong Hall* and *Nightmare Abbey*, tells us that the bookseller was eccentric and corpulent. Peacock may have inherited more from the Love side of the family than the naval tradition
9 Edith Nicolls confuses the issue by bringing in the firm of Peacock and Pellatt, of St Paul's Churchyard, which did not exist till later. She is, reasonably enough, not always reliable on Peacock's earlier years.
10. Mr Wicks's syntax confirms Peacock's opinion that he was 'not much of a scholar'.
11. K N.C., vol I, pp 90–114.
12. See Allen, *Surrey and Sussex* ii 49, and Manning and Bray, *Surrey* iii 205.
13 This is quoted by James Hannay, who championed his novels in the *North British Review* of September 1866. He had few enough supporters in Victorian times. Mr Gladstone found the novels 'unreadable'. See J. L. Madden in *Notes and Queries*, October 1967.
14. Earlier biographers give Charles's father as Roger Barwell, but Eleanor Nicholes shows that he died as early as 1771. The Barwell family had strong associations with East India House.
15. The editor was Charles Dickens. The possible connections between Peacock and Dickens are discussed later. (See end of chapter 7.)
16 'One thinks of a later friendship of Peacock's, when the unearthly spirit of Shelley found so congenial this caustic analyst of mystery.' (Van Doren, p. 9.)
17. This poem is given in full in chapter 21 of the present volume

CHAPTER TWO

1. The quotation is from Thomson's *The Seasons*, a poem which greatly influenced the poets and indeed the painters of the time.
2 The name Fraser again raises the query of possible Scottish connections On the other hand, a friend tells me that Ludlow is a well-known name in Weymouth, where Peacock was born, so there may have been a connection on the mother's side

3 See Raymond Baxter and James Burke, *Tomorrow's World*, BBC Publications, 1971. Another prophecy is that there will be a world-wide ban on petrol-driven cars by 1985. This would also have pleased Peacock.

4 It has been suggested that Auber was a schoolfellow of Peacock's, but he was several years older. He reappears when Peacock decides to try his hand with East India House (Chapter 12)

5. This quotation is from *Nightmare Abbey*. The universities (particularly Oxford) are, like the Scots, seldom out of Peacock's sights.

6 These letters in verse are in H., vol. VIII. Bohea had been described as a 'middling' kind of tea

7 The L'Estrange correspondence shows that this charmingly persistent man badgered Edith Nicolls into giving this description.

8 Cento: literally, a patchwork garment. Lines from different plays tacked together.

9 A comparison of the 1806 and 1812 versions shows an interesting change to a new fashion: 'Frown'd' becomes 'Frowned', etc. 'The Foe of Kings' becomes 'the foe of kings', etc.

10. The key here lies in a sentence from the prose analysis in the 1812 version: 'Time and change has absolute dominion over everything but virtue and the mind.' The possible causes for this move away from deism are discussed in the next chapter.

11. A list of the contemporary reviews of Peacock's works has been compiled by Bill Read, of Boston University, and supplemented by William S. Ward of the University of Kentucky. See bibliography, first paragraph.

12. 'Ossian' was, for a time, 'mentioned in the same breath as the Homeric poems'. I quote from an article by Martin Cooper in the *Daily Telegraph* of 18 September 1971, which discusses the Ossianic influence on contemporary European opera. It declined as Sir Walter Scott arrived on the scene.

13. The meaning is roughly: 'Why go through these torments to acquire riches? It is madness to scrape through life in order to die wealthy?'

CHAPTER THREE

1. The phrases in inverted commas describe Captain Hawltaught in *Melincourt*.

2. These lending libraries were flourishing, because of the price of books. See *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 5.

3. If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight.
(*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, II, 1)

4. I am much indebted here to *Before Victoria* by Muriel Jaeger.

5. *The Profession of Poetry*, Oxford, 1928

6. Most books on Peacock quote 'Newark Abbey' at this point, but it seems

to me that its full effect is obtained if we come to it at the time when he wrote it, i.e in 1842. (Chapter 19.)

7. *The Poems of John Clare*, edited by J. W. Tibble, Dent, 1935, p. 424.
8. Eleanor Nicholes points out that Captain Love had imbued Peacock with a real sense of wartime patriotism, and also that he no doubt had instruction in navigation aboard H.M.S. *Venerable* which stood him in good stead later.
9 C D., p 25.
10. To Peacock, canals were a symptom of the new age. As he remarked elsewhere, 'there are . . . no Dryads in the Regent's Park-canal'. But with the quickening of industry they were proving a valuable alternative to the rough roads, especially for Sir Josiah Wedgewood's porcelain.
11 C.D., which includes this fine quotation, goes thoroughly into Peacock's sources.
12 A reference to the fact that Pole lived there I read recently that Twitnam has now been 'vulgarized' into Twickenham

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Southey persuaded Coleridge to keep his promise and marry one of the Fricker sisters of Bristol (he himself married another), in connection with their Pantisocratic scheme for founding an ideal community on the banks of the Susquehanna.
2 This Bardic Triad is one of many used as chapter-headings in *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (Chapter 15)
3. See the description by Miss Ilex in *Gryll Grange* quoted in chapter 21, p. 00
4 The quotation is from Colley Cibber's *Richard III*, *altered.*
5. The Shelley-Madocks episode is related in chapter 5
6 Harriet Love was a cheerful cousin of Peacock's who lived for a while with him and his mother in London, and kept in touch with him when she afterwards went to live with Henry Ommanay Love in the Isle of Wight Not to be confused with Shelley's cousin, Harriet Grove, Harriet Westbrook or Harriet de Boinville.
7. In his early days Peacock disregarded the complicated Greek accents, see chapter 8. His feelings on the subject are summed up by an epigram of Martial's which he recorded in one of his notebooks·

> Turpe est difficiles habere nugas:
> Et stultus labor est ineptiarum
> (It is silly to concentrate on trifles,
> and only a fool wastes time on nonsense.)

8 While working on this chapter, I learnt that Beethoven copied out and framed these same words, and kept them constantly by him.

9 K. N. Cameron gives it as a rough guide that one can usually assume paper to be used, within three years of its watermark especially in London. See K.N.C., vol. III, p. 83.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. This was a public letter to Lord Ellenborough, passionately protesting against his savage sentence on Daniel Isaac Newton, an elderly bookseller who had published the third part of Thomas Payne's *The Age of Reason*. In addition to eighteen months' imprisonment, Newton was put in the pillory, but, instead of tormenting him, the crowd raised their hats and cheered.
2. Olwen Campbell, *Thomas Love Peacock*, chapter 3. An excellent account of the Peacock–Shelley relationship.
3. Edith Nicolls puts their meeting in Wales, but Peacock's own *Memoirs of Shelley* refute this
4. Roebuck's *Autobiography* was edited by Robert Eadon Leader, Edwin Arnold, 1897. We meet him again in chapter 20.
5. Shelley's own pamphlet, *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, appeared in 1813, three years after Mr Newton's.
6. '*Il y a cela au fond de sa pensée qu'aucun aspect des choses n'est entirement illusoire.*' Mayoux, p. 76.
7 Cameron goes into the matter in great detail, and even gives diagrams of the chariot. See K.N C., vol. III, pp. 153 ff.
8 The jealous Hogg declared that Shelley tried to get away, but was prevented, and even insinuated that Peacock must have been Harriet's lover—an idea more natural to Hogg than to Peacock.
9 Even William Godwin set up (anonymously) as a publisher of children's books, with his second wife, who encouraged the Lambs to write their *Tales from Shakespeare*
10 He took no more offence when Peacock satirized him in *Nightmare Abbey*, as related in chapter 11. See *Byron, Letters and Journals*, ed. Prothero, iii 89–90.

CHAPTER SIX

1. K.N.C , vol. III, p. 280.
2. Shelley referred to it in a letter from Chamouix of 24 July 1816:

> 'Do you, who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost, so sculptured in their terrible magnificence by the adamantine hand of necessity . . . ?'

There are also references to Ahrimanes in Peacock's *Lines to a Favourite Laurel*, written in the summer of 1814, and in a footnote to *Nightmare Abbey*.

3. Canto I, stanzas xix and xx. Note the reference, in the latter, to the policy, abhorred by Peacock, of land enclosure.
4. There is also a violent footnote, the last sentence of which (though afterwards struck out by Peacock) is interesting in its apparent reference to Shelley's *Defence of Freedom* after the imprisonment of the bookseller Daniel Eaton in 1812:

   'If a man can be robbed of his liberty and his property for the calm exposition of his opinions on speculative subjects, it is of little consequence whether the instrument of oppression be a Grand Inquisitor or an Attorney General.'
5. There will be more to say on this matter when we come to the *Memoirs of Shelley* in chapter 20.
6. Another good piece of American research here, by Newman Ivey White, *Portrait of Shelley*, vol I, p 320, New York, 1945. Cit. K.N C., vol. III, p. 364.
7 Mary and Claire were, like Harriet, both sixteen, and Shelley twenty-two.
8 Some of the events of that uneasy autumn were reflected years later in Mary Godwin's novel, *Lodore*.
9 The three friends in *A Story beginning in Chertsey*, quoted in chapter 1, are identified by Martin Freeman as Peacock, Shelley and Hogg.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 Foster is from *Φδος* and *Τηρεω*—one who guards the light. Escot, from *ες σκοτον*—one who is always looking into the dark Jenkison, from *αιεν ες ισων*—'one who from equal measures can always produce arguments on both sides of a question, with so much nicety and exactness as to keep the question eternally pending, and the balance of the controversy perpetually in *status quo*'. Gaster, or—'Venter, at praeterea nihil' The derivation of Jenkison is a splendid piece of mock etymology. Peacock's full note will be found in the collected edition of the novels by David Garnett.
2. This character is identifiable as Payne Knight, in another lengthy footnote of Peacock's As a lover of wild scenery, he had a natural aversion to the elaborate ornamentation of Capability Brown and his successors See George Kitchin, *Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English*, New York 1967, p. 260.
3 George Saintsbury points out that Peacock has taken this name from Marmontel.
4 Some people seem to think of Peacock only in terms of post-prandial merriment, with the outside world forgotten. But this is to misinterpret him The outer world is presupposed, and in *Crotchet Castle* it even breaks in
5 Peacock tells us that this song is imitated from Machiavelli's *Capitolo dell'*

Occasione. We can perhaps detect here a personal note of regret reflected much later in 'Love and Age'.

6. The reader has exactly the impression of turning from the text to glance at an admirable illustration on the opposite page

7. The Squires can be forgiven for misunderstanding Mr Cranium, who, in his invitation, used such highly technical adjectives as osseocarnisanguineoviscericartilaginonervomedullary Another nice invention, from *Maid Marian*, is Philotheoparoptesism (roasting by a slow fire for the love of God). Peacock loved inventing words—inficate, kakistocracy, titubant, etc. Van Doren has made a collection of them in his *Life*, p. 247. See also p 172

8. This outburst has been called 'exceptional' If so, there are many exceptions. This is the other side of Peacock, which we glimpse in the Henry Wallis portrait

9. See Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. VIII

10. John W. Draper in *Modern Language Notes*, December 1918.

11. The quotation is from Swift's *Venus and Cadmessa*

12. In his ironical treatment of contemporary society and civilization he is seriously applying serious standards, so that his books . . . have a permanent life as light reading' F R. Leavis, *Great Tradition*, Chatto, 1948, p. 18 n

13. For the Foster–Escot argument through the ages, see John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, Duckworth, 1970.

14 H N. Coleridge, *Table-talk*, 1835, vol. 1, p 193

15. C.D., p. 305, note 16

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. 'Fit words to words as closely as we may, the difference of the mind which utters them fails to reproduce the true semblance of the thought." *Gryll Grange*, chapter 12.

2 See J. A Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*

3 Another parallel

> And hear, half doubting, half deceived
> The songs our simple sires believed
>
> Peacock Translation from the *Hippolytus* of Euripides.
>
> . all, though half deceived
> The outworn creeds again believed
>
> Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*

4. *The Poems of John Clare*, edited by J. W. Tibble, Dent, 1935, p 419

5. As in *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*, see chapter 10, note 1.

6. This passage has been slightly abridged. The full version will be found in H., vol. VIII

7. *Wordsworth Poems*, Clarendon Press 1952, vol. II, pp 25–7.

8. Mayoux, p. 122.
9. This date has been established by a fascinating piece of detective work described in *Shelley and his Circle*, K.N C., vol. IV, pp. 709 ff. Briefly, it was found that Shelley's pen had run off the sheet onto the one below it. It was the day on which he and Byron had been out sailing and had been nearly wrecked in a storm off Meillerie.
10. Martin Freeman boldly places *Calidore* between *Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt* on the basis of an ascending scale in Peacock's clerics from the gross to the civilized. These two are not quite as bad as the Revd Dr Gaster, but worse than the Revd Mr Portpipe of *Melincourt*.
11. Another indication of the date of *Calidore*. Paper money was introduced in 1797.
12. Again, abridgement has been necessary, I hope without destroying the cumulative effect It is a classic Peacockian argument, each side making perfect sense to itself, and absolute nonsense to the other. The full text is in H., vol. VIII.
13. Shelly wrote in similar terms to Lord Byron on 17 January 1817. For a full account of this tragic story see K N.C , vol. IV, pp. 769–802.

CHAPTER NINE

1. As the hypochondriacal Uncle Hippias, this character reappears, in altered guise in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* by George Meredith. For Peacock's influence on Meredith (his son-in-law) see chapter 20.
2. Gilbert Highet, a good Scot (as I remember from Balliol days) takes the opportunity to return Peacock's fire by remarking: 'The English admire both athletes and eccentrics'. He also draws attention to the female of the species in *His Monkey Wife, or Married to a Chimp* by John Collier.
3. This is where the footnotes begin to proliferate, the most lengthy contributions coming from *Ancient Metaphysics* and *The Origin and Progress of Language*, both by James Burnett, Lord Monboddo
4. This is the villain, as Peacock makes clear by explaining that the agaric genus in botany 'comprises a copious variety of toadstools'.
5. On his way to Melincourt, he meets a young recluse called Desmond, whose story, too long to summarize, has perhaps references to Peacock's own early years in London. There is also a moment when Sir Oran sits at a tourist's sketching-stool, and is delighted 'by seeing the vast scene before him transferred into so small a compass, and growing as it were into a distinct identity under the hand of the artist'. I read recently that in Kansas, USA, a chimpanzee won a prize for painting against a number of schoolchildren
6. Peacock was not exaggerating. One rotten borough, Old Sarum, which returned two members to Parliament, was entirely uninhabited, and the franchise was popularly alleged to be exercised by its thorn-bushes

7. Wordsworth had accepted the office of distributor of stamps for Westmorland in 1813 (David Garnett). Mr Kill-the-dead is John Wilson Crooker, author of *Battles of Talavera*. Mr Vamp is probably Gifford of the *Quarterly Review*
8. Cf. 'The light of the kitchen fire was probably the brightest spot in the dark ages.' *Gastronomy and Civilisation*. (See chapter 20.)
9. Here, Peacock notes: *Quarterly Review*, No XXXI, p. 236. The whole passage is similarly documented
10. H., vol. I, lxx.
11. This chapter must therefore have been written very near to the date of publication. He even includes a reference to a speech made by Canning on 29 January 1817.
12. See Magnus C. Ratter, *Schweitzer, Ninety Years Wise*, Wallington: The Religious Education Press, p. 155.

CHAPTER TEN

1. From *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*, one of his last pieces of writing unpublished in his lifetime. Quoted further in chapters 12 and 13
2. See the passage quoted at the end of chapter 1 and chapter 6, note 9.
3. See Florence A. Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Bentley & Sons, 1889.
4. Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*, 1850, vol. II, p. 194.
5. The authorship is not stated, but it is referred to in the *Edinburgh Review*'s November issue as a forthcoming publication by the author of *Sir Hornbook*.
6. This was a fashionable subject for light poetry, cf Hookham Frere's *King Arthur and his Round Table*, or *The Monks and the Giants*
7. Compare the Druid scene in *The Genius of the Thames*
8. Keats drew upon this passage for *Lamia*
9. Cf Mr Falconer's speech in *Gryll Grange*, quoted in chapter 21 See also Shelley's 'The Gods of Greece'.
10. See H., vol. VII, pp 440–1.
11. This will be found in H., vol. VIII
12. 'He had little or no appreciation for John Keats. Indeed, he never passed the portier of the green little Temple erected by Keats to Diana, without remembering with indignation the barbarous fancies consecrated there, for he could prove by a hundred quotations that the sleep of Endymion was eternal, whereas in the modern poem the Latmian shepherd is for ever capering up and down the earth and ocean like the German chaser of shadows.' (Robert Buchanan.) See also the references to Keats in chapter 14.
13. There were plans at about this time for a tragedy on Otho. Peacock got as far as a title page and list of characters, which are among the manuscripts at the British Museum. By a coincidence, and quite independently, Jane

Austen's *Northanger Abbey* appeared in the same year. It was probably written earlier.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Shortened, these days, to the blues.
2. This has been seen as a reference to Shelley's love-affair with his cousin, Harriet Grove, but it might equally well refer to Peacock's own broken romance with Fanny Falkner. There are those who, like Mr J. F. Newton with his Zodiac, see Shelly in everything.
3. In the same tradition is Ben Travers's butler, Death, in *Thark*. Act II, if I remember aright, ended with his entering the drawing-room during a thunderstorm, and asking the guests, 'What time would you like your call?'
4. Another picture of Coleridge, and a much more effective one than Mr Moley Mystic of *Melincourt*. 'Flosky· quasi φιλοσκος, a lover, or sectator, of shadows' (Peacock.)
5. Thought to be Peacock's friend, Sir Lumley Skeffington
6. Such an episode occurs in the work of that title translated from the German of the Marquis de Grosse.
7. From now on, music in general, and Italian opera in particular, enter more and more into Peacock's novels This is discussed in chapter 16
8. Coleridge named his two eldest children Hartley and Berkeley (David Garnett)
9. Peacock is speaking, of course, of the old-fashioned eighteenth-century empirical scientist. The new technology comes in for plenty of attack in the later novels
10. From Goethe's *Stella*, in which the hero, Ferdinand, is in much the same dilemma as Scythrop.
11. *Childe Harold*, canto IV, stanza cxxiii.
12. ibid canto III, stanza lxxi. These notes are Peacock's, and the whole scene is similarly annotated.
13. As the chairman said in *The Alarmists*. See chapter 2
14. C.D , pp 221–2.
15. In the Roberts Collection of the Haverford College Library, there is a letter written, in 1860, from Peacock to 'Sir Henry' (presumably Cole), who had written on behalf of a friend who wished to set Peacock's words to music. Peacock said that he was welcome to do so. See the contribution by David Bonnell Green, of Boston University, to the *Philological Quarterly*, vol XL, October 1961

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. David Garnett, *Collected Novels*, p. 441.
2. Letter to Shelley of 29 November 1818.
3. This charming old-fashioned phrase is from the East India Company's Committee of Correspondence Report of 12 May 1819.

4. Letter to Shelley of 13 January 1819.
5. Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, 1852, vol. I.
6. See chapter 14, note 6.
7. This remarkable poem, which seems to be a composite picture of Peacock's emotional life, is given in the chapter on *Gryll Grange*, XXI.
8. The full text of *The Four Ages of Poetry* is in H., vol. VIII.
9 Many points made on the side by Peacock are necessarily lost in this summary. For instance, he here points out that Herodotus stands between the two ages—he is less of a poet than Homer, and more of one than Thucydides.
10 Published by Basil Blackwood in 1921. An earlier American edition of the *Defence*, edited by Professor A. S. Cook, included the *Four Ages* as an appendix in small type, but made no mention of its importance or its influence on Shelley.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1 *Studies Green and Gray*, 1926. David Garnett points to Dr Folliott's remark about Sir Walter Scott in *Crotchet Castle*: 'My quarrel with him is that his works contain nothing worth quoting'.
2. Chapter 2 of *Maid Marian* is headed by a splendid quotation from Rabelais· 'Vraymoyne si oncques en feut depuis que le monde moynant moyna de moynerie,' translated by Urquhart and Motteux, 'A right monk, if ever there was any, since the monking world monked a monkery.'
3. In passing, Peacock draws brief attention to the intervening episcopal regency, in which Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, showed his sense of Christian fellowship by incarcerating his opposite number, the Bishop of Durham.
4 'Harp-it-on· or, a corruption of '*Ερπετον*, a creeping thing' (Peacock). In other words, Southey—'a very useful person . . . always ready . . . to undertake any kind of courtly employment, called dirty work by the profane. . . .'
5. This passage is a satire on the Holy Alliance, which had just put a number of unwanted monarchs on various thrones in Europe
6. This song first appeared in *Clari*, on 8 May 1823, with music by Sir Henry Bishop, who composed the music for the stage version of *Maid Marian* the year before (David Garnett).
7. Peacock's criticism of Thomas Moore's book is dealt with at the end of the next chapter.
8. J. R. Planché, *Recollections and Reflections*, vol. I, pp. 46–7 See the contribution by Vincent Troubridge to *Notes and Queries*, 1 July 1944.
9. In *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond* Thackeray and Peacock became good friends in later life.
10. George Saintsbury claims that *Maid Marian* is one of the most popular of all Peacock's novels For a less romantic view of Robin Hood, see Vernon Scannell's hilarious poem in his *Walking Wounded.*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Shelley heard the news in April, and wrote on 1 July. The succeeding lines are the famous ones quoted at the end of the Introduction. A. B Young quotes another quaint description of Jane, as a 'Welsh turtle', by Thomas Lovell Beddoes, in one of his letters

2 E J. Trelawny was afterwards to write one of the books on Shelley which, happily, provoked Peacock into writing the *Memoirs.*

3 The boat was afterwards recovered, with her masts gone and her bowsprit broken There was some argument as to whether she had been swamped, or run down by a felucca. Peacock believed some of the damage could have been done during the salvage operations See the *Memoirs of Shelley*, H , vol. VIII.

4 At another party, Peacock went to sleep. When criticized, he observed that he was merely behaving like 'A Peacock at Home'—the title of a comic poem by a Mrs Dorset which was then going the rounds. H., vol. I, p. lxxxi. Evidently fashionable parties ranked with fashionable literature.

5 His views on *Endymion* have been quoted in chapter 10, note 12

6 Lamb retired in 1825, after thirty-three years service, having reached a salary of £750 For his first two years, he was paid nothing. Peacock, then years younger, came in at a starting salary of £600 and by 1823 had reached £1,000 It would be surprising if this had not something to do with their disregard of each other.

7 Professor Bain, in his *Life of James Mill*, tells of long Sunday walks which Mill took for his health and expected others to take with him. See bibliography.

8. Peacock's behaviour in this situation accorded with the motto on his signet-ring· *nec tardum opperior nec praecedentibus insto.* He neither obstructed the man behind him, nor trod on the heels of those ahead.

9. As told in chapter 5.

10. Foster points out that this is MacCulloch the Professor of Political Economy at London University, not M'Culloch, the head of the Examiner's Department. This incident is used in *Crotchet Castle.*

11. Wilberforce had, in the year of Peacock's birth, left Pitt's government and undergone a religious conversion in Wimbledon. His Society had been powerful enough to stop the military training on the Sabbath during the Napoleonic Wars.

12. There was a modern version of the idea, by Roger Woddis, in a recent *New Statesman*.

> Workers are absentees,
> Business men relax,
> Different as chalk and cheese;
> Social morality
> Has a duality—
> One for each side of the tracks.

13 In the *London Magazine* for October 1822 an article appeared on the poetry of Nonnus, under the pseudonym of 'Vida'. Cole accepted it as by Peacock, but it is most uncharacteristic, and this same 'Vida' also wrote a most unpeacockian defence of Southey A more likely bet is an unsigned article, also in the *London Magazine*, of February 1825, concerning 'bubble companies' and an unfortunate investor, Mr Gudgeon See Martin Freeman, pp. 277–9.

14 More about these in chapter 19. They were published in 1837 after James Mill's death.

15 Later, Peacock was to complain that Tennyson and Millais were under a similar misconception.

16 The essay, and Peacock's other critical writings of this period, will be found in H, vol VIII See also H, vol I, pp cxxxiv–v

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1 Herbert Wright, 'The Associations of Thomas Love Peacock with Wales', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, Oxford, 1926. See also R W Barber, *Arthur of Albion*, 1961.

2 Edith Nicolls says that parts of this speech are a paraphrase of one made by Canning in 1825.

3 'In the fourteenth and fifteenth books of the *Dionysaca* of Nonnus, Bacchus changes the river Astacis into wine, and the multitudinous army of water-drinking Indians, proceeding to quench their thirst in the stream, become franticaly drunk, and fall an easy prey to the Bacchic invaders In the thirty-fifth book, the experiment is repeated on the Hydaspes "*Ainsi conquesta Bacchus l'Inde*", as Rabelais has it' (Peacock)

4. The four letters of the name of God· *θεός*, deus

5 This leads to another charming footnote (too long to be quoted here) on the spider weaving in suspended armour as a source of peace and inaction He illustrates this from Bacchylides, Euripides, Nonnus, Beaumont and Fletcher, and ends by reminding us of Hogarth's cobweb over the lid of the charity box David Garnet quotes it in full, on p. 596 of the *Collected Novels*.

6 Father Bernard Walke, who wrote the Cornish St Hilary plays for his villagers, once told me that in the True Arthurian Church of Christ there is the Triad of Arthur, the uninspired statesman, Lancelot, the man of inspiration flawed by lust, and Galahad, the pure, and like Taliesin, of mysterious birth This triadic idea seems to have found its way into Peacock's novel.

7. The *Cambrian Quarterly*, April 1829, p 231.

8. T. H. White knew his Peacock, as is shown by his adaptation of 'The War Song of Dinas Vawr'.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. See chapter 19
2 See Sir John Browning, *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1877, p 351.
3 The notices quoted in this chapter are from the *Examiner*, and will be found in H., vol. VIII The Halliford does not profess to include all Peacock's musical notices One or two further ones will be found in the recent book by Howard Mills. See also *His Fine Wit.*
4. Peacock was the last person to be taken in by sheer rapidity of execution, as exemplified by that most 'scientific' amateur of the fiddle, Mr Cornerlius Chromatic, who appeared in *The Dilettanti* and in *Headlong Hall*
5 He writes again of Beethoven in his article on Bellini (chapter 19), and Dr Opimian speaks with admiration of *Fidelio* in *Gryll Grange*
6. *New Yorker*, 23 August 1947, pp 72–74, 77.
7 It will be remembered that the flute and the French horn were the two instruments played by Sir Oran in *Melincourt.* Peacock also anticipated Hoffnung in his appreciation of the comic possibilities of music. See, for instance, his account of the playing of the Gamwell string quartet (Scrapesqueak, Whistlerap, Trumtang, and Muggledrone) in chapter 6 of *Maid Marian*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1 They signed their threatening letters 'Captain Swing'. One of these gangs makes its appearance at the end of the novel.
2 Lord Brougham promoted scientific, rather than classical education. Peacock talks of 'The Steam Intellect Society'. 'The March of Mind', as he ironically calls it, begins to take the place of medievJl monkery as a satirical target. But, as Raymond Wright points out in his edition of this novel 'We need not conclude from this, as some of his critics have done, that he was turning conservative, but merely that, as a reasonable man, he distrusted logicians and new orthodoxies as well as old ones.'
3 A couple of years earlier, a London banker named Rowlandson had absconded to the New World with his clerk and a great deal of cash On 4 January 1829, a poem by Peacock appeared in the *Globe and Traveller*, no. 8194

> Hoho! hoho! pray who can show
> Whither has fled great Touchandgo?
> He's gone off in a chaise and pair,
> And not a man on earth knows where.

4. His name is derived from the Latin, Follis Optimus (a first-rate pair of bellows) and he claims descent from the twelfth-century bishop, Gilbert Folliott, who had the best of it in a verbal encounter with the devil. See Peacock's note in David Garnett, p 655.

5. Coleridge again, by now a statutory guest at Peacock's house-parties. The identity of MacQuedy is discussed later in this chapter.
6 Probably Leigh Hunt. Cf. Peacock's remarks in his review of Thomas Moore's Byron.
7 David Garnett suggests that this may be the young Sir Edward Strachey. But Peacock may be parodying himself.
8 Robert Owen, a great Trades Union pioneer.
9. Philpot means 'the river-lover'. Various explorers of the time have been suggested, but there may again be a hint of self-parody. The motto which prefaces the novel is to the point here:

> Le monde est plein de fous, at qui n'en veut pas voir,
> Doit se tenir tout seul, at casser son miroir.

This is a slight improvement on lines by the Marquis de Sade, who took the idea from Claude Le Petit. See David Garnett, who also gives this translation from Mark Lemon's *Jest Book*:

> He that will never look upon an ass,
> Must lock his door and break his looking-glass.

10. Peacock wrote in a letter to L'Estrange: 'The "dingle", in *Crotchet Castle*, is a real scene, on the river Velenrhyd, in *Merionethshire*. There is no chasm on that river which it is possible to leap over, but there is more than one on the river Cynfael, which flows into the same valley. I took the poetical license of approximating the scenes. That on the Velenrhyd is called Llyn-y-Gygfraen, the Ravens' Pool.' A photograph of it appeared in *The Times* of 30 December 1932, in a series called 'Landscape and Letters'.
11 Mayoux coins the somewhat mischievous phrase, 'tranquillity remembered with emotion'.
12 He had been made Lord Chancellor, and created Lord Brougham and Vaux. Peacock, was not alone in his dislike. For some of Brougham's antics, such as appearing drunk at the races in his Lord Chancellor's robes, see David Cecil, *Lord Melbourne*, pp. 116–17 and 126. In 1831 Peacock had lampooned him in *The Fate of a Broom*, and added the poem to the footnotes of *Crotchet Castle*. It was also included in the *Paper Money Lyrics*
13 See the chapter called 'The Wand of Enchantment' in his book, *The Crazy Fabric*, an astringent but interesting critical assessment of Peacock.
14. In 'Peacock's Economists: Some Mistaken Identities'. See bibliography.
15. Shelley's word, it will be remembered, for a City Nymph.
16. *Survey of English Literature 1780–1830*. Chapter 11 ends with a quotation from the same essay, which also contains an interesting comparison of Peacock's style with Meredith's.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1 Sir William Foster, *East India House*, a book to which I am much indebted in this chapter See also C H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784–1834*.
2 See chapter 12.
3 See bibliography, F. R. Chesney.
4 This article is unsigned, and the Halliford editors do not include it; but they say that its authorship is 'proved by letters preserved at East India House'. (H., vol. I, p. clxiii.)
5. Not all these memoranda are by Peacock It would be difficult to establish authorship without a detailed appreciation of handwriting and style. But there can be no doubt that Peacock was the moving spirit.
6 See Ralph E Turner, *The Relations of James Silk Buckingham with the East India Company*, Pittsburg, 1930.
7. See a 'Memorandum of the Part Taken by Thomas Love Peacock Esq. in the Promotion of Steam Navigation' by John Laird (among Mrs Clarke's papers)
8. This letter will be found in Edith Nicolls's *Biographical Notice*, Cole, vol I
9 I am grateful to Mr Martin Moir, Assistant Keeper, India Office Records, for showing me the original Court Minutes at Orbit House, Blackfriars Road, London, where they are now kept.
10 This is a point emphasized by Eleanor Nicholes in K N.C , vol. I, pp 90–114.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1 The Manchester–Stockton railway opened that very year. The train service to Walton-on-Thames, making a daily journey to and from Lower Halliford possible, did not arrive till 1848. It is referred to in *A Story beginning at Chertsey*
2 This letter is dated 13 October 1835 See K N C , vol IV, p. 590
3 Both these articles seem to be leading towards a full study of Paul de Kock, which never materialized. Over 140 books by him were found in Peacock's library after his death
4 See chapter 34 of *Gryll Grange*, where Miss Gryll says: 'We have passed Christmas without a ghost story This is not as it should be. One evening at least of Christmas ought to be devoted to *merveilleuses histoires racontées autour du foyer*, which Chateaubriand enumerates among the peculiar enjoyments of those *qui n'ont pas quitté leur pays natal.*' As, for instance, Peacock.
5 He would appear to have been roped in at the last minute. A list of contributors in the *Athenaeum* of 3 December 1836, does not include him, but in the issue of 7 January 1837, the list begins: Theodore Hook, Thomas Love Peacock, Father Prout Evidently Dickens, the editor, was looking for variety.

6. Apart from his family tragedies, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Hazlitt, and Lamb were all dead. Not all of these were his friends, but he must have felt that he was the lone survivor of a generation.
7 See Sir John Cam Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*.
8 It appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, with the last instalment of *Gryll Grange*. It was much admired by Tennyson.

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. General Nicolls's obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of May 1865 also mentions that he was active in the suppression of the slave trade, another fact which must have recommended him to Peacock.
2. Charnock contributed an imaginary article for the *New York Herald* of 1 July 1849, giving an account of an inter-stellar space flight.
3. Hardy of the *Victory* stayed there. So did Captain Marryat's hero, Peter Simple, after escaping from France
4 Meredith afterwards declared that he had been tricked into the marriage. He also exaggerated the age-gap between them from seven years to nine.
5. Like Mr Escot with marriage, he took advantage of the railway while deploring it in principle.
6. Meredith's poems were printed by J. W. Parker and Sons, who were the printers for Fraser's, now Peacock's publishers, from which it may be assumed that Peacock promoted them.
7 Edith Nicolls carried on the family interest in such matters. In 1874 she went to the National Training College of Domestic Subjects, and was Principal of it from 1875 until 1919, when she retired. I am grateful to Mr B. G. Stone, O B.E., a Trustee of the College, for his correspondence about this.
8 There is an excellent account of this unhappy marriage in Lionel Stevenson's book on Meredith (See bibliography, and see also Rene Galland. *George Meredith les cinquantes premieres annees.*)
9. From *Memories of George Meredith* by Lady Alice Butcher.
10. Goethe was also mentioned in the introduction to the *Horae Dramaticae*. Here, it has been suggested, Meredith may have influenced Peacock.
11. The Cratinus article is sometimes quoted as a proof of Peacock's bibulous inclinations, but Sir Edward Strachey's description is worth remembering: 'a kindly, genial, laughter-loving man, rather fond of good eating and drinking, or at least talking as if he were so'. Strachey also admitted the danger of confusing Peacock with some of his characters. Peacock, I think it might be said, was a platonic drinker.
12. See chapter 6

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1 These mottoes are of course given in the original Greek and Latin,,and there is also a great deal of Boidardo's Italian. These will be found in

editions of the novel. Like Dr Opimian, Peacock believed that translation could never capture the essence of the original. See chapter 6, note 1.

2. In a footnote, Peacock refers to a fragment of Plutarch, in which the enchantress Circe, whose habit it was to turn sailors into swine, brought Ulysses and his companions back to their human form. Gryllus, another victim, preferred to remain as he was
3. A recent book on wine states that good Opimian kept its bouqet for over a hundred years So, we shall find, do many of Dr Opimian's remarks
4 The British Museum have the catalogue of Peacock's library, when it was sold at auction by Messrs Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge *on 11* and 12 June, 1866.
5. In a footnote here, Peacock, quoting from Abraham Hayward's *Art of Dining*, 1852 tells of a French chef who had been eighteen years in Dresden and learnt no word of the German language. A quoi bon, messieurs, apprendre la langue d'un people qui ne possede pas une cuisine?
6. Niphet is derived from a Greek word meaning snow-shower.
7. David Garnett rightly records this as the last voluntary immersion in Peacock's novels
8. Peacock quotes from Gardiner's *Music of Nature*· 'The drone of the cock-chaffer, as he wheels by you in a drowsy hum, sounds his *corno di bassetto* on F below the line'.
9. There are indications that this poem was written considerably earlier, but Peacock thought it worth including Peacock the novelist seems to allow Peacock the satirist his head at some point in each of the novels.
10 The curious book written about the building trade at the turn of the century. It contains such characters as Alderman Sweater, with his brother, the town engineer, Oyly Sweater, and the Alderman's rival as a candidate for Parliament, the Baron d'Encloseland. It is set in Hastings.
11. See chapter 15, note 6

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1 'The abomination I entertain for gas and tobacco prevents my taking up my quarters there even for a night. Science has greatly multiplied the old metropolitan horrors'. Letter to Lord Broughton, 22 February, 1866. It is given by Edith Nicolls in her *Biographical Notice*, Cole, vol. I, from which other passages in this chapter are taken.
2. See chapter 20, note 4.
3. See chapter 17, note 10 Another service L'Estrange performed for Peacock was to rewrite and amplify an account of him which appeared in *Men of the Time. A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Living Characters* in 1862, and which L'Estrange considered inadequate
4 See chapter 13, note 2.

5. A comparison has been made with the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in London's Westminster Abbey.
6. He left £1500. One wonders what happened to Edith Nicolls until she went to the National Training College of Domestic Subjects in 1874 (see chapter 20, note 7). It may be assumed that she kept in touch with her father's family. Mary Ellen had done so. David Bonnell Green of Boston University refers to a letter from Peacock dated 1 January 1857, and addressed to 'Mrs Meredith, care of Lady Nicolls' at Blackheath. (*Philological Quarterly*, vol. XL, No. 4, October 1961).
7. In his review of Thomas Moore's *Epicurean*. His dreams of Fanny Falkner were referred to in Chapter 1.
8. At the end of chapter 9 *in Victorian Fiction*.
9. Carl Dawson, in his shorter book, *Thomas Love Peacock*, applies this phrase specifically to *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction* by Mario Praz.
10. This quotation heads chapter 13 of *Gryll Grange*.
11. Quoted in chapter 13. Remembering Dr Opimian's dictum (see chapter 13, note 1), I have not attempted a translation

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